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# ROOKSTONE

By the author of  
"PATTY"



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# ROOKSTONE.

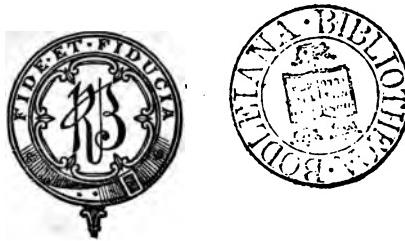
A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WILD AS A HAWK,"  
"HESTER KIRTON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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# ROOKSTONE.

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## CHAPTER I.

FRANCOIS LEROUX SHARPENS HIS WITS.

MONSIEUR LEROUX left the station as soon as the train was in motion, and when he found himself fairly alone in the road he took Janet's note out of the pocket-book in which he had carefully placed it, and read it through.

The first reading seemed unsatisfactory, and he went through it again; then he looked at the back, and finally folded it up,

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and put it back in the pocket-book, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows till his forehead looked like the flutings on a picture-frame.

"It is inconceivable," he said; "there is here"—tapping the pocket-book—"only what I knew before, not one word about secret or dispute; and there must be a secret, and there has been a quarrel also, or monsieur would not take so much trouble to hinder Mees Janet from seeing madame. I felt so glad to get the billet, and ma foi, it is no use to me. Where is the point at which I must begin to find this secret? It gives me fresh energy, fresh life, to have the idea of discovering something; besides, it is useful to me. In this quiet country life I rust—I become as a turnip or a water-melon for

intelligence. When I return to the capital the police will no longer benefit by my services, I shall have become too stupid to be useful ; allons, François, my friend, sharpen thy wits, it is always best to begin at the beginning. When didst thou first smell out this idea ?”

He walked on slowly, thinking ; but till he reached the avenue he could not in any way recall when his first dim suspicions had awakened. He settled that they had come by degrees, caused chiefly by the singular change in his master.

“ He was never gay,” he said, “ but he was willing to trust all to me ; now he is for ever displeased with somebody, and he grows more and more stern and silent. Even when madame is with him I do not

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think he laughs or takes any enjoyment from his life ; it is strange, too, when he has a son to succeed him, and everything he can want. If there is a secret, madame does not know ; I am sure of it ; she could not be so happy and careless when she plays with her bebby. Still she does not seem always so happy, but that is perhaps because her husband is so grave and dull."

He went on in silence, till something in one of the tree-trunks reminded him of his walk there with Thompson. She had pointed out its peculiar growth to him.

" Ah," he said, " if that civil young person had come with the sister of madame, I would have had the secret from her—quick—quick as I take the cork from a bottle, for Madame Thompson knows it of course, if

Mees Janet knows it, and mees must know it, or monsieur would not exile her from madame—”

He stopped suddenly—a flash of light had shot into his brain, and shown him what he was seeking. He thought all over again now, and link by link his scattered memories arranged themselves to point all in one direction—the study. He had not seen the light burning there on the night of Janet’s discovery, but he had not then set himself to trace out the secret he now believed to exist. He had not been expressly set to watch Janet on that night. He had been told carelessly by his master to keep a good look-out in the evening, and if the old woman Robbins came prowling about, to send her back to her cottage.

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Mr. Wolferston had said no more, but the quick-witted Frenchman had noticed the coldness of his manner towards Janet, and had jumped at the conclusion that his master wanted to prevent Kitty from getting speech of her. He had watched diligently through the evening ; but once the rustling among the bushes had nearly betrayed the old woman's presence, still he had found nothing to report to his master. When Richard returned home—he found his faithful spy in the hall, where he had taken refuge from the rain—Leroux said he had seen nothing of Mrs. Robbins.

“The trees rustled once,” he said, under the study window, “and I looked about, but there was no one.”

And then his master had released him

from his post, and as soon as Leroux was safe indoors Richard hastened round the corner of the building, and saw Janet's tell-tale candle through the study window. But Leroux knew nothing of this; the circumstance that had startled him when he thought of his walk with Thompson was the remembrance of Mrs. Wolferston's death-like swoon. He had joined in the search for her; he had looked all over the saloon a very short while before he was called to help in bearing her up-stairs. Where had she come from in that fainting condition? He had not left the entrance hall, so she could not have gone in that way; he was certain she was not in either of the rooms at each end of the saloon, he had looked in them; she must then have

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been in the study. Why was that door always kept locked ? The housekeeper said it was because of deeds and papers which Mr. Wolferston's absence from home had prevented him from sorting and arranging, and Leroux at the time had accepted this reason as valid. He smiled now at his own credulity.

" We sing songs like this to children," he said ; " it has a Blue Beard's room then, this Rookstone, has it ? and it is possible that Miss Janet has also had a peep in the terrible study, and that is why she is so sent away without ceremony. Aha ! monsieur, my master, I mean you no harm ; but you make life dull and unpleasant at Rookstone, and I have the right to take a little revenge to amuse myself. Yes, it is

the study ; the secret is there ; my master has not been joyful or pleasant to me ever since the poor lady, his mother-in-law, went away ; and I do not think he has been in that room since, except the night before Mees Janet departed."

Still this idea was not worth much ; he might be able to find his way into this Blue Beard's chamber ; but what was he to look for when he got there ? He was clever enough to know that his suspicions must be more definite before he could act upon them. He had reached the house by this time. He wanted to find Mrs. Wolferston alone, and he went into the saloon on the pretence of seeing to the huge fires which were blazing in the grates at each end of it.

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Mary was still sitting near one of the fires. She looked sad, but less discontented than before.

Leroux went up to her, and then, looking round with an air of great mystery, he informed her that Miss Wolferston had given him that note for Madame, and had charged him to deliver it to her when she was alone.

“Miss Wolferston ! Where did you see her ? does Mr. Wolferston know she is here ?”

Leroux bowed his head gravely.

“Mees Wolferston is not here now, madame, she 'ave gone back to London ; but I do not think monsieur will like madame to be inform of her sister's visit ; madame may trust me, I can be silent.” He laid his

hand on his heart in an impressive manner and went away.

Mary read the note, and the longing to see her sister grew stronger. The discussion with her husband about Janet had taken away any surprise she might have felt at this mode of communication, but it deepened the pain. She knew Richard's resolutions and dislikes were unchangeable.

There was comfort in Janet's promise, and yet what did it amount to ? As long as Richard loved her she could never really want help or counsel so urgently as to justify her in sending for her sister. She thought she would show Richard the note, and then she remembered what he had said before he left her. It would only make matters worse between him and Janet if



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she betrayed any knowledge of her presence at Rookstone. It would make a fresh dispute with Richard—"No, I cannot vex him again," she thought. While she had been sitting there before Leroux came in, she had been taking herself soundly to task about Richard's jealousy of his baby—it was all her fault, she knew it was; she loved her husband as dearly as ever, but she had given up many little ways, which he doubtless missed, so as to spend more of her time with her child. While she was dressing for dinner Richard came into her room; he asked her to send away her maid.

"My own darling," he said, as soon as they were alone—and his voice had the strange fascination, a sweetness full of subdued power, which made him so irresistible

—“forgive me, I was cruel to you just now. When I think how much more I have done to show my love for you than most men have, it is wonderful that I can cloud the only happiness I have ever known.”

She looked up at him lovingly, too much moved to weigh his words, and he went on,—

“I told you once, my darling, that you were the only being who had ever understood me or done me justice. I can say more than this now ; it is only when I am actually with you that I know a moment’s peace or happiness ; you are all I have ; can you wonder if I am jealous of every minute you rob from me ?”

Never since their marriage had he spoken to her with this strange frankness—a frank-

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ness which became almost vehement when he spoke of his love for her. It was delicious to the young wife to listen to this assurance of the affection she feared to have alienated, and yet a secret sense of dread mingled with her joy.

“ But, Richard, darling, it is dreadful that you are never happy or at peace unless we are together. Think how young people die sometimes, and if I were to be taken away from you—”

He started as if some one had given him a blow, and a look of terror, and then of defiance, came into his face.

Clasping his wife closely to his heart, he spoke in the hard stern voice that had lately become so habitual.

“ You must never say that again : the

thought comes too often as it is, and it makes half my misery. I will not contemplate it ; I will not believe such injustice possible. Hush, darling !” She tried to interrupt him, and he went on more gently : “ I know all you want to say, and when I am able to think such an idea possible—and there are times when it masters even me—I wonder how I can ever leave your side for an instant—ever waste one fraction of the happiness that may be so short. There, I did not want to bring tears.” He stooped and kissed them fondly from her eyes. “ Ring for your maid, and I give you five minutes only before you join me in the saloon, and then you shall spend the evening in chasing all these shapeless terrors from my head.”

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Again he kissed her, and Mary, bewildered between her passionate delight and the vague sense of underlying fear, was so restless under her maid's hands that even the adroit French girl was at last obliged to remonstrate.

## CHAPTER II.

*SETTLED.*

HENRY WENLOCK went back to his office from Mrs. Webb's, but he found his work intolerable. He had always detested writing, and now he asked himself how he could have been so foolish as to give up a profession he liked for mere office drudgery. If Janet would neither marry him nor give him her confidence, he had better have remained in the army.

He did not believe in Mrs. Webb's fears

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for Janet's sanity, but he thought it most unbefitting that his promised wife should fly about the country in this way, without giving any previous warning of her intentions. As the afternoon wore on this thought grew troublesome, and he began to wonder at the supineness with which he had taken for granted that Janet was really at Rookstone.

He could not remain in doubt any longer, and he left the office hurriedly.

At the station he found there would be no train for Rookstone for an hour, but that there was one expected from Rookstone almost directly.

While he stood waiting it came up, and Janet got out of one of the carriages.

She started when she saw him, and then

such a happy, glad look beamed out of her eyes, that Henry's anger melted for an instant. But he kept down the relenting that wanted to make peace at once. While still anxious, he had brought himself to attribute all Mrs. Webb's warnings to spitefulness. It might be that Janet had gone away to avoid her cousin's unkindness ; but now that he saw her safe in London again on the same day as that on which she had started for Rookstone, he began to think she must indeed be very eccentric—more eccentric than he could have thought possible ; and until she had fully explained her conduct, it behoved him to maintain a dignified reserve.

“Are you going back to Vincent Square ?” he said, stiffly.

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He did not ask permission to accompany her. He had made up his mind not to quit sight of Janet till she was safely bestowed somewhere ; he wished heartily that he had the right to take her to his own home.

“ Yes,” but she looked surprised at his question.

The cab drove up and Janet got in, and then, as soon as Henry Wenlock had followed her, she looked at her lover.

There was an archness mingled with the happiness that beamed out of her eyes, that in his present mood was, to say the least, disconcerting ; but Janet was too full of joy at the delight of seeing him to be chilled by his manner. She felt years younger in the possession of that exquisite

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bliss which for the time will overcome the reserve of even the most timid among us, consciousness of our own power to make another happy.

"I have seen Mrs. Webb to-day, and she told me where you had gone," Wenlock said, gravely. "Are you not terribly fatigued, Janet?"

His last words had grown severe, for no shade of regret or annoyance showed in those blue eyes raised so lovingly to his.

Janet did not look confused, she laughed.

"I am too happy to feel tired yet." Then seeing his unsympathising expression, she stole her hand gently through his arm.

"You are vexed with me, darling, and I cannot wonder. I ought to have told you I

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was going to Rookstone, but I thought I should, perhaps, be at home again before you came to Vincent Square."

"And that I need know nothing about it." He spoke more stiffly, and though the little hand still lay on his arm, it stayed there of its own free will.

A depth of tenderness swam into her eyes.

"No, indeed, my own. I should have told you all I am going to tell you now, all I can tell you, for the discussion between myself and Richard is of too private a nature to repeat." Her lover's face darkened again, but she went on. "I met him on my way to Rookstone. He forbade me to see Mary; he wishes to keep us apart for the present. I may as well tell you," she added,—she saw he was not satisfied,—

“that Richard and I quarrelled the last time I went to Rookstone, and we are not likely to be friends again.”

“So much the better — I do not like him ; but why did you go down there to-day ?”

“I wanted to see him, and I should have been glad to see Mary too, but as he does not wish it, of course we must be strangers for the present.”

“What do you quarrel about ?”

Janet had been dreading this question, and yet she was almost glad to hear it, for she knew Henry would have asked it sooner or later, and it seemed to her as if her fate hung on the way in which he might receive her answer.

“That was what I meant just now by .

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saying that our discussion must remain private—”

“Even from me!” He drew himself away from her, and sat upright, looking so proud and stubborn, that for a moment she felt hopeless—felt as if all her life’s happiness was going to be sacrificed, after all, to this secret.

She gazed at him with such a timid softness, such a yearning tenderness, that as he looked down into her face at her next words, he felt as if he must take her to his heart and trust her for ever.

“Henry, I know all you are feeling, but you cannot know how I have longed to say all this to you before, or how bitter it is to me to keep anything from you; and, darling, while I thought that this secret

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might prove any cause of vexation between us, I was so determined that your happiness should not be affected by it, that—that—I do not think I could ever have become your wife while a fear of this lasted ; but I hope it is over. The matter itself is now so wholly bound up in Richard and Mary, that I cannot see what interest it could have for you in its present state, even if I were free to speak of it, and I am not.”

So far Henry had listened eagerly, every moment with growing interest ; but now he suddenly clasped Janet’s hand in both his, and broke in abruptly,—

“ Then you will be my wife now, Janet ? If I have understood you rightly, this was the bar to our marriage ; my darling, my

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darling, why did you not trust me sooner ?  
why did you not let me stand between you  
and all these vexations ?"

In his transport at this unexpected prospect of happiness, he could not listen to her repetitions that she was still as much bound as ever to keep the secret from him. He forgot all his resentful doubts about Mr. Paison and the confidence she reposed in him, and by the time they reached Vincent Square he was pressing her eagerly to fix the wedding day.

Janet told him that he was unreasonable, but she promised at last to give him an answer to-morrow evening, when he came to Mrs. Webb's.

As the cab stopped a new idea occurred to him.

"Don't you think you might go and stay with Mrs. Dawson until we are married? I feel as if you would be happier there."

Janet thought for a few minutes.

"In some ways, yes; but Aunt Dawson is away from home till the end of the Christmas holidays, and then I could not leave Christy alone in Vincent Square, and the walk to school would be much too far for the child at this time of year from Aunt Dawson's. No"—she smiled up at him—"I know why you wish for this, darling; but we must make the best of Mrs. Webb, I believe one *sees* the worst of her—poor woman."

## CHAPTER III.

## AN ACCIDENT.

IT was a singularly early spring; the leaf-buds on the trees swelled rapidly, promising a speedy unfolding. Little more than two months had gone by since Janet's last visit to Rookstone, and yet the year looked, judging by outward signs, much further on its way than the last week of March. Spring flowers, however, were still shy and backward; here and there a wild strawberry blossom starred the hedge-bank,

but the village children out on holiday rambles had to search closely for primroses for their Easter posies.

Richard Wolferston was driving his wife home across the park. Just within the gates they met the nurse carrying the child in her arms, a healthy, lively boy, nearly six months old now. He held out his arms and crowed with delight as the carriage stopped beside him.

“Oh, you darling!” Mary exclaimed; “give him to me, nurse. Oh, Richard,” for her husband remonstrated, “you must let me have him just a little minute. Baby would like a ride, wouldn’t he, the darling! Look, dear, I have him quite firmly in my lap. You can go home, nurse, I mean to keep him.”

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Her husband looked vexed, but her bright face made him ashamed of thwarting her.

"Well, if you let him fall, don't say it was my fault." He touched the horses lightly with his whip, and they dashed rapidly along the avenue. "Hold him fast," he said, and turned into a grassed road that led to the house by a nearer way.

Mary was laughing at some baby exploit, and her husband looked fondly down on her sunny face. Just then the horses started, plunged, and reared madly, the carriage jerked violently on one side, and Mary was thrown out, with her child clasped in her arms.

Almost as she fell Richard sprang down, and was at the ponies' heads before they

could move forward. He looked round for his wife, but he dared not leave the struggling, terrified horses. Mary was not stunned. In a minute or two she had raised herself, and was sitting up on the grass with her child in her arms. Richard looked round for help, and then he saw the cause of the mischief.

An old woman with her apron full of faggot wood stood trembling in the path of the terrified horses. It was Kitty Robbins ; but she looked so pale and scared, that for the moment Richard had not recognised her.

“ Curse you, you old hag !” he said, fiercely, “ how dare you come prowling here ?”

The words changed Kitty’s fear into

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fury. She knew that Mary lay there on the turf beside the carriage ; she knew, too, that the angry squire could not leave the still frightened, struggling horses, but she could not find room just then for any thought but the wrath he had raised.

“Dare ! is it *you* who dare I, Richard Wolferston ? A man should be sure he be on his own land afore he warns others off it ; stolen goods never thrives, and ye may find the curse come back to 'ee and what owns 'ee.”

Then she moved slowly round to the side of the carriage. Mary was still sitting with her child in her lap when Kitty reached her ; the little creature had fallen on its head, and it lay senseless, although otherwise it showed no mark of injury.

Richard dared not leave the horses' heads, though he saw what had happened.

"Could you manage to get with him into the carriage again?" he said to Mary, "and then I will lead the horses home."

"Oh, no, I could not. Go home as fast as you can, and come back to us."

It seemed the only thing to be done, and as the horses were quieter since Kitty had removed out of their sight, Richard sprang into the carriage, and drove rapidly away.

Mary's eyes were fixed in such intense agony on her child, that she had forgotten Kitty's presence till she spoke.

"Let me take he, Muss Mary," the old woman said, quite gently; "maybe I'll bring he to—"

"No, no, I'll not part from him," and

Mary clasped the unconscious child still closer. The pressure roused him ; he half opened his eyes, and began to cry.

"Thank God him 'll do now," said Kitty, with a sob ; "Lord love 'ee, him dwoant ail nougħt."

Mary kissed him, and soothed, and at last quieted the sobbing child.

"'Ee'd better let I take he"—Kitty held out her arms—"and then 'ee can be moving, Muss Mary. Do 'ee feel hurt anywhere? 'ee'd be best at whoam now, I'm thinkin'."

But Mary had heard Kitty's words to her husband, and she drew back with evident repugnance.

"No, Kitty, I could not let you touch my child after what you said just now.



You are very wicked to speak in such a manner to Mr. Wolferston ; I believe he could have you punished."

"Let he try!" The evil light flamed up again in the old woman's eyes. "There beant no law agin tellin' the truth, Muss Mary, and if 'ee believe yon husband o' yourn owns the Park by lawful right, 'ee believe a lie."

Something in the words, but more in the solemn manner of the speaker, went straight to Mary's conviction. "Go away," she said faintly. She was still sitting on the turf, and it was well that she was so sitting, for her limbs seemed to grow weak suddenly, and all her powers of consciousness to become dim.

Kitty retired out of sight among the trees.

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"An old chattering fool I be, I'd best bite my tongue out," she said to herself ; "it wur one thing to say it to he, but what call had I to frighten she, poor lamb?"

Richard was soon back again, followed by Leroux, the nurse, and some other servants, and amid a sort of chorus of sympathy and wonder, Mary and the baby were conveyed to Rookstone.

Leroux's sharp eyes had spied Kitty lurking among the leafless trees. He had heard his master say she had caused the mischief, and he lingered behind to speak to her.

"Good evening, Madame Robbins," he said, advancing towards her, "it is a fine mischief this which 'ave happened."

"Your master should keep to beaten

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tracks, then. What call had he to leave the drive to come across this joltin', on-even road, driving like mad as him do?"

Leroux looked at her curiously, and divers little remembrances came back.

"It appears, madame, you not like very much Mr. Wolferston?"

"No, I dwoant, an' what o' that?" She laughed in a short hard way, and then she looked full in the Frenchman's inquisitive face.

"For what reason do you not like him, madame?" said the Frenchman, politely.

"For reasons o' mine, and as thay bees mine I mean to keep 'em, and not give 'em to 'ee. What call ha' you to come askin' questions about the master whose bread ye

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live on ? Go along wi' 'ee, 'ee dirty sneak, tryin' to creep up my sleeve with your wrigglin' furrin ways—go along, I say."

She stood resolutely pointing towards Rookstone, and Leroux, taken rather aback by the quickness with which she had read his purpose, turned in the direction she indicated.

" Ma foi, she is a vitch," he said ; " she must be one ; and yet I am perfectly sure she knows about the secret of my master and Mees Janet. I have been thinking this long time to speak to her, but it is useless ; she is a too spiteful old woman. All I can do now is to see Madame Thompson, and find if she know anything."

## CHAPTER IV.

*JANET'S VISITOR.*

IT was, as has been said, the end of March, and the time fixed for Janet's marriage was drawing near.

At first Mrs. Webb had thrown decided obstacles in its way, obstacles suggested so skilfully that they had appeared even to Janet insuperable, and at last, when everything had seemed propitious, little Christy fell ill with measles ; he was so very ill that Janet would not trust his nursing to

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any care but her own, and spite of all her tender devotedness weeks passed before the child could safely leave his sick room.

But all this was happily at an end. The marriage was at last fixed definitely to take place in a month, and Janet was sitting now with her little brother, chatting over plans for the future.

“ You see you will be quite strong before we come back, darling, and then we shall all be so happy together.”

Christy looked at her fretfully. His likeness to Mary was very striking since his illness.

“ Why can’t I go with you, too ?” he said. “ I don’t want to go to the seaside alone with Thompson, she’s not amusing,

and she doesn't know the name of anything. I don't like to be with stupid people."

Janet laughed. She was so happy and bright now, no wonder Christy clung to her companionship.

" You are growing such a wise little man," she said ; " but now that you can read, Christy, you can answer some of your questions yourself. You must not be selfish, dear. I will give you some nice seaside books to take to Hastings with you."

He did not look content, but before he could answer, a servant came in and asked if Miss Wolferston could speak to Thompson for a few minutes.

" Yes, tell her to come upstairs."

" Then I shall go," said Christy ; " if

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I'm to be shut up with Thompson for a whole fortnight, I shall have enough of her."

"Oh, Christy!" so tenderly spoken that, already ashamed of his petulance, he went back to his sister, with a half-strangling kiss and a whispered "I'm sorry," and then ran away to hide the tears his growing manhood despised.

Janet leant back in her chair musing, her lips parted a little, and her eyes full of soft sweet thoughts. There were no conflicting doubts to furrow her brow, or to tighten the relaxed curve of the rosy mouth. She was very, very happy.

It had been painful to delay Henry's happiness for the sake of nursing Christy, and yet it had been a clear duty; even her

lover had consented cheerfully that she should fulfil her mother's part towards her little brother. How good, she thought, Henry had been to her through all, how unselfish ; and now she was to spend all her life in trying to make him happy.

" Not that he wants it," she said, softly to herself. " He is too good not to be happy, and any woman he loved must have given him her whole heart."

There was a tap at the door, and Thompson came in. Janet had expected her for some days past. She had not gone to service again when finally dismissed from Vincent Square. She had joined a friend who had set up a small dressmaking and millinery establishment in Pimlico, and Miss Wolferston had promised to entrust

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her with some of the wedding outfit. Therefore she felt much surprised to see a serious look of disquiet in poor Thompson's inexpressive eyes, instead of the smiling eagerness with which she had received the news of the approaching marriage. Janet took no notice, however. She unfolded a large parcel which lay on the sofa, and asked Thompson's opinion of some of the dresses she had been buying. Thompson looked at them with a sort of resigned patience.

"Very nice; very pretty, indeed, Miss Wolferston—elegant, I may say, and, above all, what your poor dear mamma would have chosen."

Here she heaved a deep sigh.

"You must excuse me, Miss, but I've

been thinking so much of her since yesterday that I'm only in poor spirits. Ah, Miss, how true it is in the midst of life we are in death."

Janet was silent. She thought, with Thompson, that five months—for it would be scarcely a longer period—was scant time between her mother's death and her own marriage ; but she knew what her mother's wishes would have been, and she felt there was no real want of affection in consenting to marry Henry.

"It's best to tell you at once, ma'am, for you'll hear it soon enough ; but it does seem so sad to have happened just now."

"What has happened ?" Janet's heart beat quicker, for she saw that Thompson had really something to communicate.

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“ Well, ma’am, Mrs. Wolferston ’s lost her baby. It was upset out of a carriage, it seems, and in the evening it had a fit and died. Poor lamb !”

“ Oh ! how dreadful. But how did you hear this ? Are you sure, Thompson ?”

“ Sure and certain, ma’am. I was minding the showroom yesterday, and who should walk in but the French gentleman from Rookstone, Mr. Leroux, and he told me all about that and other things too. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! Miss Wolferston,” Thompson broke down into a sort of pitiful cry. “ I acted for the best—I really did ; but what with his way of asking questions and that, I couldn’t sleep all night, and the only thing seemed to be to come and tell you all about it.”

Janet was so absorbed in sorrow for her

sister's trial, that she had not taken in the sense of Thompson's words.

"Do you know how my sister is, or when this happened?"

"About a week ago, I fancy, ma'am; and I think Mr. Leroux said poor Miss Mary had kept her room ever since; but really, ma'am, I don't know the particulars; what came afterwards frightened me so that at first I nearly forgot all about the dear babe. I must tell you, if you please, ma'am."

Janet looked up surprised. She thought it was some private trouble of Thompson's to which she was asked to listen, and she wondered she should choose such a moment for communicating it.

But Thompson was too much interested in what she had to tell to heed the expression of her listener's face.

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“ First of all, Mr. Leroux began asking me if I remembered the last evening your poor dear mamma and I was at Rookstone, and of course I did. It wasn’t likely I should ever forget such a fright as I got at seeing her lying on that blue couch as white as death ; and then he looks at me in a sort of strange, clever kind of way, and asks me if I had any idea where Mrs. Wolferston had been all the evening ? Now, here’s where I was foolish, ma’am, and, oh, dear ! oh, dear ! I hope I haven’t done harm. But he led me on, sympathising with me for losing her, and my being thrown out of such a good situation, and talking of his own pleasure again at seeing me ; for he said it was the first holiday he’d asked for for months ; but he felt

such a strange longing to see me. And so, ma'am, I thought it only perlite to ask him to have a cup of tea ; and you know there's something sociable in tea-drinking. It leads you on, as it were ; and, little by little, I hardly know how, he got out of me all I knew about that study at Rookstone, and the papers your poor dear mamma found in the davenport, and—”

An exclamation escaped from Janet's lips, a sort of anguished cry. This treasured secret which she had fancied laid at rest till repentance should quicken in Richard Wolferston, known to a man like Leroux, over whose silence she could exercise no power !

“ But how do you know anything about the study or papers, Thompson ? ”

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She tried to look indifferent, but the woman shook her head.

“ Dear me, Miss Wolferston, you forget I never left your poor dear mamma in her illness when you was not with her, and often when she lay in those long dozing fits she told quite enough to make me guess where she had fainted, and why, even if I hadn’t felt certain of it before, because where could your poor dear mamma have been that afternoon if she wasn’t in the study ? I was out, but Leroux and all the rest had hunted everywhere from top to bottom of the house ; and as to being out of doors, which the squire pretended to think, why her bonnet was in her room, and your dear mamma was not the lady—no, indeed, Miss Wolferston—to run about

in the evening with nothing on ; but, ma'am, I assure you, if you ask any of the Rook-stone people, you'll find they're all in the same story, they all think Mr. Richard came by his rights in an unfair, underhand way. I don't say they know anything, but they all think poor dear little Master Christy's been ill-used."

Janet had had time to recollect herself.

"I am very sorry, Thompson, you repeated anything you may have overheard to Leroux ; and I must think you were very wrong to do it. If this man comes to you again, I hope you will refuse to speak on the subject at all."

" You may be sure of that, ma'am. I wouldn't have named it again to a soul, not to you even, only I thought somehow

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it might work round, and get a lot more made of it, and I'd rather you should hear what really did take place."

Thompson thought it more prudent to suppress the opinions she had volunteered to Leroux on the subject of his master, and after she had been again warned by Janet never to mention the subject to any one, she departed from Vincent Square lighter-hearted than she had come there.

## CHAPTER V.

### MARY'S APPEAL.

MARY WOLFERSTON'S child lay out of sight under the great grey stone at Rookstone churchyard.

Gone away just when the spring flowers, of which he had seemed to her a type, were every day revealing their presence. "Her bird," she had called him, and now, as every morning the songs came in fuller, richer music from the trees, they waked sadder echoes in the bereaved mother's heart.

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It was the day after the funeral, and still Mary sat in her room, heavy-eyed and listless, as if her life had no further purpose in it. Richard had tried to comfort her, but for the first time she was indifferent to his tenderness ; she wanted to be left alone, she said, she could not talk yet. And he had left her much to herself during all these days of sorrow. He hated grief ; it was so natural to find sunshine in his wife's lovely face, that it disturbed and irritated him to see it disfigured by sorrow. He had grieved for the loss of his boy, but more from pride, and sympathy for Mary, than because he had as yet conceived a strong love for the child himself. But he thought she had sorrowed long enough, she ought to rouse herself now, and he went indoors to seek

her. Mary took no notice of his approach ; even when he took her hand in his she did not look at him.

"Come, Mary, it will do you good to take a turn with me in this bright sunshine, you have been indoors long enough."

"I cannot, indeed I cannot ; I shrink away from the brightness. Ah, Richard, if you had loved baby you would not want me to be happy again."

He soothed her, and then, finding she still remained stubborn in her grief, he spoke more firmly. He told her she would injure her health, and that she ought to consider that she belonged to him as well as to her child.

"Richard," she said abruptly, almost as if she had not heard his words, "you surely

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will let Janet come to me now. You must."

A bright spot came on her cheek, and a feverish, eager light into her eyes. She was trying for courage against the opposition she expected.

"Don't ask me that, my darling. I will do anything else you please, but I cannot let you see Janet."

Mary got up from her chair, and stood facing him ; for he had turned away from her as he answered.

"What is this you are hiding from me, it is something I ought to know ?" she said ; "other people know it, and you keep it hidden from me. Richard, it is because Janet knows something you do not wish her to know, that you drive her away from



Rookstone. No, don't stop me ; I want to tell you everything ; I knew Janet came here in January. I thought then it was cruel of you not to let her see me, but I know now that you were afraid she would tell me what she knew."

"What are you talking of, Mary ?" he said with an oath—but he turned so pale that she felt sure she had hit on the truth—"you have grown crazed sitting up here with your moping fancies." He stopped, and made a strong effort at self-control. "Come out into the sunshine, and get rid of all these follies."

Mary was dreadfully shocked, but his vehemence had roused her, and, like many another timid woman, having once forced herself to the attack, she grew bold in main-

training it. Blotted out for the time by her baby's sudden death, Kitty's words had recurred with terrible significance during the long lonely hours. She had spoken just now at random in her anger at his refusal, scarcely believing in the existence of a secret ; but Richard's sudden paleness and agitation awakened a deep and overmastering dread.

Strangely, too, in that moment of suspicion, the affection which ever since her sorrow had seemed frozen and stagnant, now welled up again to shield her husband from harm.

“Richard”—she spoke so solemnly that he was compelled to listen—“what is this ? Tell me, my darling—I shall love you just the same—but is it true that you ought not to have Rookstone ?”

“No, it is not, and if Janet told you this,



I feel more than ever glad that I separated you from her."

But he did not meet her eyes as he answered, and try as she would against it, a doubt of her husband still remained in Mary's heart.

"It was not Janet," she said, gravely, "it was old Kitty."

Richard cursed the old woman.

"I don't care who it was, you ought not to have listened to such nonsense." He turned angrily away.

She reached him before he opened the door to go away.

"Are you quite, quite sure it is nonsense? I love you so much, darling, that I will believe you did all for the best, if you will only tell me all the truth."

He turned round suddenly and faced her.

“Mary, I have been such a husband to you as few women possess ; but if you persist in this folly, you will drive me away from you ; if you cannot believe me, if you cannot be happy with me, you will have to try a lonely life.”

He left her. She cried bitterly at having roused his anger ; but she could not get rid of her doubts ; do what she would to lay them, they revived. Oh, if she could only see Janet, and ask her how she ought to act ! She resolved to make one more appeal to Richard. If he would not let Janet come to Rookstone, he would perhaps consent to let her go up to London and see her sister.



## CHAPTER VI.

*JEALOUSY.*

THE result of Thompson's visit to Vincent Square was that Janet determined once more to see Mr. Paison. On the day when Henry had met her at the railway station, Janet had discovered, rather from instinctive perception than from any open complaint on his part, that her lover disliked her visits to the old lawyer. Since that time she had not consulted him. Her secret being laid at rest, she had felt inde-

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pendent of Mr. Painsong's counsels ; but, besides this, she had a secret dislike to seeking them, since she had remarked his manner at her last visit.

Lately Mrs. Webb had invited Mr. Painsong to dinner. He had come more than once, and at every visit it had seemed to Janet as if he purposely disagreed with Henry Wenlock ; and, moreover, her lover, so happy tempered and friendly towards every one, was always irritated by Mr. Painsong's presence.

"He is never a bit like himself when Mr. Painsong comes," thought Janet. "It is plain they do not like each other, and I wish Mrs. Webb would not ask them to meet."

But Mrs. Webb saw the mutual dislike

between the two men and understood it. She had fully resolved by this time to set aside Janet's marriage. Besides her own wishes in the matter, she believed that Louisa had a liking for Henry Wenlock. She did not dream that so well-brought-up a girl as her daughter could have ventured on the extreme impropriety of falling in love. Mrs. Webb's creed was that that love is the safest and most lasting which comes after marriage ; but she thought it was quite natural that Louisa should admire Henry Wenlock, and think him handsomer and more agreeable than any one else who visited in Vincent Square.

Mrs. Webb had never believed in the reality of Henry's attachment to Janet. He had fancied himself in love with her,

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no doubt, before he went to India, and now held to his engagement from some over-strained notion of honour; but if he could once be seriously offended—made actually jealous—Mrs. Webb believed that he was impetuous enough to break off at once with Janet, and propose to some one else.

“ And it must be Louey’s own fault if she is not the person—so much more suitable in every way. The real difficulty lies with Janet. I don’t want to injure the poor thing; but she and Mr. Paison would pair off so nicely together, she is much older than her age. I can see the whole thing. If only another quarrel would come up between these two ill-matched young people, it would be easy enough. I would not let matters take their course as I did last time. The

fact of the matter was that I had no idea they would ever make it up so quickly ; I did not think that little Janet so deep ; very foolish, too, for she'll never be happy with Henry, and she's just the wife for Mr. Painson. She would be richer, too, and she used to be so fond of him."

In making these reflections, Mrs. Webb scarcely did justice to her own shrewdness. She had, it is true, contemplated marrying her daughter to Janet's promised husband, but Henry Wenlock's scanty means had been a serious drawback to his distinguished appearance and titled connections. Within the last fortnight, however, an event had occurred which had placed him on quite another footing in her eyes. It has been said, that soon after his return to England he

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went down into the country to visit some relations—Lord and Lady Fletcher. These people had just lost their only son, and although there were several daughters, the property was strictly entailed, and must, unless another son were born, descend with the title to Henry Wenlock. Another son might be born, but this was not probable. It seemed to Mrs. Webb that Henry was tolerably safe of the inheritance, and surely it would not matter how humble Louisa's home was at first, if eventually she were to succeed to a title. A title! Mrs. Webb could not control her excitement when she thought of it—to own a title, or to be on visiting terms with the person who owned one, being a privilege, in her eyes, more to be coveted than any other. People

might be foolish, ignorant, ill-bred, insolent, but if they were titled, that which they did was to be imitated and applauded—no subservience was too low, no praise too high, to bestow on them, and her own daughter to be titled ! Oh, it was like a glimpse of heaven !

She had been trying to arrange her plans rather more definitely lately ; as a primary measure she had informed Henry Wenlock that Mr. Painson was desperately in love with Janet, and then she had taken every possible opportunity of throwing the two men together. She noticed Janet's avoidance of her old friend, and it puzzled her. Mrs. Webb would have given much if she could have found out that her young cousin still sought the lawyer's advice, as she had done after her mother's death.

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"Well, he is coming to dinner to-night," Mrs. Webb said, "and I must do what I can; much may happen in a month."

This was the day of Thompson's visit, and when Janet heard Mr. Painsong announced, she resolved to ask him to see her next morning at his office.

She was afraid Henry would not approve of her doing this; but after thinking the matter over, she had come to the conclusion that it was the only course left to her. If anything were to be done with respect to Leroux, it would be much better that Mr. Painsong should appear in the affair than that she should do so. If the man were at once told that his suspicions were valueless, he would not try to act on them.

What Janet dreaded was, that if Leroux endeavoured to get at the papers which he knew had so terrified his mother, and Richard discovered him, he would suspect that Janet was the Frenchman's employer, and harden himself yet more against the confession of his own guilt. Yes, she must see Mr. Painsong.

It was not a large party — composed chiefly of young unmarried people and Mr. Painsong; he took Mrs. Webb in to dinner—she had managed to place Henry and Janet at the other end of the table, and another pair of engaged lovers beside Mr. Painsong, so she had the lawyer to herself. She asked him how he thought Janet was. He glanced down the table. Janet was looking grave, without the bright smile

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which had lately become habitual to her ; and as he kept his eyes fixed on her, she looked at him anxiously.

“ Not quite so well as the last time I saw her,” he said to Mrs. Webb.

“ Ah ! you see it, then ; poor girl, as the time draws near for this marriage, I’m afraid she has misgivings. I believe there never was more complete self-deception on both sides than there is in this case.”

Mrs. Webb drew her thin lips together, and put all the significance they were capable of expressing into her small black eyes.

Mr. Paison felt interested—this was a new view of things ; he wanted to hear more ; he knew very little of Mrs. Webb, but he thought her a pretty-mannered



woman enough, and her recent civilities had disposed him to judge her favourably.

“ Dear me ! do you really ? I always understood it was a marriage of attachment on both sides.”

She laughed her peculiar laugh.

“ I sometimes think, Mr. Paison, that in this world we have only to label things according to our own notions, in order to make other people think the same. I was told that this was a marriage of attachment ; but then you see I am a mother, and mothers have wonderful insight in these matters, especially when a girl in poor dear Janet’s position is confided to them ; besides, you see, I can remember my own dear mother’s anxiety about me. Do you know, Mr. Paison, she could hardly make

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up her mind to part with me, even to Mr. Webb. ‘Louey, my dear,’ she said, ‘if you are not going to be happy, I shall break my heart.’ It was fortunate for me, you see, that I had such an unexceptionable husband, for after that I could not let my mother know any extent of misery—she would have broken her heart.” Mrs. Webb looked down in a sentimental manner, and sighed, too much taken up by herself just then to notice Mr. Paison’s weariness.

“How one thing calls up another,” she said. “Dear me ; it seems only yesterday that I was stroking my old cat, and mamma said, ‘I can’t let the cat go too, Louey. It wouldn’t do, you know ; I should miss you both so dreadfully ;’ so as I thought dear John would not be satisfied with the cat



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instead of me, I thought it better to let mamma keep it. I'm afraid you'll think me very silly."

She looked up in his face with such a would-be-sixteen air, that Mr. Painson wondered.

"The old fool," he said to himself; "she must be forty-five, if she's a day." But he said aloud,—

"Very charming, indeed,"—then more gravely—"but why do you consider our young friends ill-matched?"

"Why, it's just this"—she gave a quick glance round; Henry was talking to Mr. Webb, and Janet was listening to him—"he has no appreciation of *her* remarkable powers of mind. You think her very clever, don't you?"

"Very—altogether superior."

"Yes, I know you must think so; and she has already discovered this want of sympathy, and will pine for the support of a higher mind; in fact, what Janet is suited for is to be the wife of a man much older than herself. I have thought—of course from certain things I have noticed this may be only a fancy of mine—whether she has not met with such a mind since she engaged herself; but she is so reserved and has such a high sense of honour, that she would sacrifice herself before any one could discover if this were so."

Mr. Painsong began to grow interested. Even Mrs. Webb's silliness was forgotten as he listened to her.

"Do you think so? This would be very



sad," he said. "Am I to understand that you consider this was a mere boy-and-girl liking, which time and absence have been too much for?"

"That is exactly what I do mean. I believe, if one only dared to interfere, that both would be much happier apart, and yet it is just one of those cases in which I see no possibility of interference."

"I must say I can't agree with you," said Mr. Painsong, curtly. And then he began to talk on other topics so decidedly, that Mrs. Webb saw the matter must be left quiet for the present.

As soon as the gentlemen came upstairs, Mr. Painsong went up to Janet, and remained talking to her nearly all the rest of the evening. She had never found such a

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Henry began the conversation. He talked to Janet about her, which she remembered in her boyhood days. In many years of her life she had never told any one all her heart filled with such sweet memories, and her eyes now beamed with tenderness. At first, when she saw Henry standing near her, she had wished Mr. Painsong far away, but by degrees she became deeply interested, and her impatience changed into earnest listening. Mr. Painsong paused at last, and then she made her request for an interview next morning. His face beamed with delight. Janet scarcely knew why, but she blushed at the eagerness with which he expressed his readiness to see her.

"Come, come, Janet," said Mrs. Webb,  
"I cannot let you keep Mr. Painsong all to



yourself in this way. I want him to hear Louisa sing."

She carried him off in triumph to the piano. Henry Wenlock was standing there, but seeing the coast clear, he moved towards the other room, where Janet sat alone now, for the other guests had crowded round Louisa.

"Wait a moment," said Mrs. Webb, as he passed her.

She was beside him a minute afterwards.

"I want to tell you something; only I have such a horror of interfering," she whispered.

"So have I," Henry smiled and looked on towards Janet. He heartily wished Mrs. Webb were a man instead of a woman. But she was resolved not to lose an opportunity of breeding discord.

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“Do you remember what I told you about Mr. Painsong—I mean his attachment to a certain person?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, he has been talking to me about her all dinner-time; went so far as to say it would be very sad for her to marry if she did not love her husband as well as she once thought she did. Now, don’t be so very impatient. What I think is that Janet ought to be told this, and then really she would not give the poor old man so much encouragement, she is positively going to call on him again to-morrow.”

“Very likely.” But Henry Wenlock bit his lip, and Mrs. Webb let him go on to Janet, sure that her words would rankle.

Janet looked so radiant with happiness

at his approach that he had no heart to say anything in the way of complaint, and Mrs. Webb's manœuvres would have been fruitless if Henry had not been beside Janet when her old friend said "good-night" to her.

"To-morrow, then." That was all, but Mr. Painsong looked ten years younger as he spoke it, and Wenlock felt as if he could have thrown him out of window with the greatest satisfaction. Repressed wrath seldom fails to break bounds, and all the smothered impatience of the first part of the evening blazed into fire. "What did the old idiot mean by looking in that sentimental manner? and what need had he to hold Janet's hand in his a moment?"

Mrs. Webb took good care to leave

Henry alone with Janet as soon as the door closed on Mr. Painson.

“ What are you going to do to-morrow, Janet ? ” he said. “ I cannot imagine what you can want always running after that old noodle.”

“ Oh, Henry, remember what a friend he has been to us all, and how long he has known us.”

“ What did he mean about to-morrow ? ”

A slight flush rose on Janet’s cheek. She did not wish to keep her visit a secret, but Henry’s tone was unpleasant ; it was harsh and suspicious.

“ Only that he would see me at his office ; I asked him if I might go there.”

“ If it is only a business question, I really think you had better employ either



me or Mr. Webb. I don't like the notion of your going about by yourself to a lawyer's office."

"I have been there before."

"I know you have, and I disliked it then. I really wish you would send a note instead of going to-morrow."

Janet's spirit rose. This interference seemed to her very like tyranny. Her mother had always urged her to consult Mr. Paison, and why should Henry oppose it?

She looked at him frankly. "I think you are a little unreasonable to-night, dearest. I have one or two things to say to Mr. Paison. This will be my last visit to him."

"Why could you not say them to-night?

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If you persist in calling on him to-morrow,  
I will go with you ; it will be better in all  
ways."

"Indeed, dearest, I must go alone," she said, quietly, although her heart ached at this fresh cause of disagreement ; "it is simply a family matter. If you like, Henry, I will promise that it shall be my last visit, but I must go to-morrow."

"Very well ; do as you like. It is plain your own will is of more importance than any wish of mine. Good-night."

"Henry, don't go away angry." Her eyes were full of tears, but he did not look at her. He wanted to get away before he should say something which she could not forgive. He was half mad with jealous anger.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LEROUX'S TIDINGS.

NEXT morning at breakfast Janet found Louisa and her mother in angry discussion.

"The fact of the matter is, my dear, that you are growing very self-willed and unfeminine, just like some one else I know!"

Janet's entrance checked Mrs. Webb's words.

Louisa looked sulky.

"It is so dull here," she said; "you do nothing but pay visits from morning till

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night, and Janet thinks of nothing but Christy. If I were going to be married I should take rather more interest in my gowns and things than she does. I want to go to Julia Fuller; she would like to have me, I know she would; there is some fun to be got out of Julia!" And Louisa gave a dreary sigh.

She had grown to like Henry Wenlock very much indeed.

While Janet had talked to Mr. Painsong on the previous evening, Henry had stood beside Louisa at the piano, and had praised her singing.

"Poor dear fellow!" she sighed to herself, "it's all over with him, I don't believe he's at all happy; there's no chance of that ridiculous engagement being broken off now

the day is fixed ; but if I'm to feel like this when he goes away, I would rather not see him any more till he really is Janet's husband. Then I suppose there will be no danger in flirting with a married man ; besides, he will be my cousin."

She said all this to herself in her own room, and then she remembered a long-standing invitation from an old school friend, and determined to accept it at once.

Before Janet left the breakfast table Louisa had carried her point. Her journey into Norfolk, to stay with Julia Fuller, was settled to take place early next morning—her mother yielding on her promise to return at the end of a fortnight.

It was very trying to Mrs. Webb that Louisa should be so restive just when all

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her schemes seemed likely to prove fruitful ; but then, as she told herself, Louisa could be very unattractive when she chose to be so, and if her will was crossed in this matter she would probably sulk and look ugly for a week. If Henry really cared for her daughter —and Mrs. Webb fondly cherished this hope—a short absence might awaken more decisive feelings, especially just now when he had gone away angry ; for Mrs. Webb, although too far off to hear what had passed, had studied the young man's face intently during his talk with Janet.

“Obstinate mule !” she said. She was looking out of her window, for busy as Mrs. Webb asserted herself to be, she never lost sight of the doings of others. In fact, to watch, chronicle, and criticise these, for the

mental food of her fellow-gossips, was the chief business of Mrs. Webb's life, and the work for which her mental capacity appeared best suited. As she looked now, she saw Janet crossing the square.

"Obstinate mule that girl is! Going to old Paison's, of course. I could not have believed her so short-sighted, after all Henry Wenlock looked last night. I really do think she likes the old man the best. Taking that child Christy with her, too—so very absurd. If she really felt the impropriety of the thing as she ought to feel it, she would have asked me to chaperon her. Not she! I really believe her abominable self-will has infected Louey."

Day by day Mrs. Webb's suspicion that Janet liked Mr. Paison grew stronger.

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Lately the young girl's spirits had been daily recovering from the depression which so much sorrow had laid on them, but when Janet returned from her visit to Mr. Paison she was silent and preoccupied. Mrs. Webb rallied her, but Janet's thoughtfulness was plainly caused by anxiety, for she soon relapsed into it again, with bent brow and firmly-closed lips.

Janet was both unhappy and anxious. She had found it difficult to get Mr. Paison to listen to her on the subject of Leroux. He had been so eager to talk to her about herself, and when she did succeed in fixing his attention, he treated her information lightly, and told her not to think about the matter—to send Leroux to him. He had been so strangely different—so excited, so

changed from the half-scolding, fatherly manner she was used to—that Janet had felt puzzled and disquieted, and at parting from him the warm admiration his eyes expressed had made her withdraw her hand abruptly from the very close grasp in which he held it.

Sitting in her own room now—for Mrs. Webb's joking and tittering laugh soon grew unbearable—she asked herself why she had thus shrunk from Mr. Painsong, why she felt such an unutterable repugnance from the idea of ever having to consult him again. A warm blush rose to answer her. She had thought Henry harsh and unreasonable, but she understood his meaning now; and yet it was too vain, too foolish to believe that Mr. Painsong loved her. No;

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the reason why she shrank from him was because he had found fault with Henry. She went in thought over the morning's interview, and her first conviction deepened. Mr. Painsong had asked her very earnestly if she was quite sure that the marriage she contemplated would promote her happiness ; and when she had answered him—half in doubt whether he were not jesting—he had sighed. He hoped Mr. Wenlock would know how to treat a wife better than most young men did. Ah ! and then he shook his head, and Janet got up to go away, feeling vexed and disturbed.

She began to think that it had been a mistake to consult any one but Henry. Mr. Painsong had imagined that she reposed greater confidence in him than she did in

her future husband ; but then her mother had strictly enjoined her to consult no one but Mr. Paison, and she remembered, with a sudden new light on it, the lawyer's refusal to help her unless she promised entire secrecy.

" But he did not think about me then in this foolish way, I am sure of it ; and after all, it may only be a vain fancy. Still, I cannot go to his office again unless Henry goes with me."

The door opened, and Mrs. Webb came in.

" So sorry to disturb you, dear, but there is some one wanting to see you ; and as it seems to me that he may be an impostor, I thought I would just come and ask you a question or two first."

Janet looked her answer ; she knew Mrs.

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Webb would tell her own tale without help.

"I can't think you know this man ; he won't say where he comes from, or give his name either ; but I am sure he is a foreigner, I should say an Italian, by his dark appearance ; he keeps on saying he wants to see Mees Wolferston. I've no doubt he is an impostor, and wants to steal something."

"I believe I know who it is," said Janet ; "he had better come here and speak to me."

"Know him ! dear me ! but really, my dear, had you not better see him in the hall ? Suppose he's a swindler ; he may take your watch and your purse—rob the house, in fact—and be off before we know a word about it."

"No, he is not a swindler"—Janet smiled—"but I can see him in the dining-room, if you don't like him to come up-stairs."

"Yes, dear, I really think it will be much better to see him in the dining-room ; and it so happens I'm sitting there just now, doing my accounts ; it wouldn't do at all, you know, my dear, for you to see a person of this kind alone."

"Then I am afraid he must come up here after all," said Janet, resolutely ; "I know his business is private ; you can settle it whichever way you please."

Mrs. Webb had learned by this time that this short, decided manner of Janet's, which she alone had the art of eliciting, admitted of no appeal, and therefore she said Janet had better come down-stairs, she

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really could not give unknown foreigners  
the run of her house.

Said very spitefully, but entirely lost on  
her young cousin. Janet guessed that it  
was Leroux, and shrinking, as she had  
learned to shrink during the last few hours,  
from Mr. Painsong's good offices, it was very  
painful to be obliged to refer this man to  
him—for doubtless he had come to make  
her an offer of his services—on the subject  
of the will.

It was Leroux—looking so exceedingly  
bright and happy, that for a moment Janet  
thought he must be the bearer of good  
tidings.

“Have you brought me any message  
from Rookstone?” she said.

Leroux shrugged his shoulders.

“ I have a message for you, Mees Wolferston, but it is not from Rookstone.”

“ Who is it from ?”

Janet spoke very coldly.

“ It is from the sister of mademoiselle, Madame Wolferston, she is in London now.”

“ In London ! Where ?”

Janet got up from her chair ; she must go to Mary at once.

“ Pardon, mademoiselle, I have not yet given the message.”

The Frenchman looked surprised at her impatience—at Rookstone Janet had appeared a quiet, sedate personage ; he paused till she had seated herself, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

“ Mademoiselle, there has been a great deal of chagrin at Rookstone. First, the

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bebby 'ave died. Ah ! it is very sad accident ; it is too 'orrible that a child's life must pay for a bundle of wood ; *ma foi*, I think so."

"I don't understand," said Janet, greatly alarmed.

"Ah ! mademoiselle have not heard ! *Bon !* I will tell you. Monsieur is driving madame one fine evening, and madame has the bebby on her knees ; there is an old and ugly woman —a witch, Robbins or Kitty she is called— who puts it in her 'ead to gather a faggot in the path of the carriage. Madame talk to the bebby, and I imagine monsieur look on and smile. Suddenly, *crac !* the horses jump, the carriage turn over, and madame and the bebby are on the ground. Well, mademoiselle, we all go ; I especially lead on the rest. I find madame and her bebby

and bring them home ; they seem well, quite gay and 'appy, and then—in the evening I hear a cry from the nursery. Madame is there bending over the bebbey. She say, ' Run, fly, fetch the doctor, quick, quick, my child die !' Well, mademoiselle, I go, I run, I almost fly ; but of what use ? Alas ! none. When I arrive back with the doctor the bebbey is one little corpse !"

Janet sighed deeply.

" How is my sister now ?" she asked.

Leroux shook his head very gravely, and his eyebrows followed the movement of his shoulders.

" Ah !" —he drew out the word—" that is endeed a serious question, Mees Wolferston ; but you will see her to-morrow,

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and then you will know for yourself. At first, she do not eat or drink, and I think she do not sleep neither, for she keep so pale and ill ; then she write to you two, three times ; I 'ear her tell to Mr. Wolferston she will do so, and he become very angry endeed."

"Stop," said Janet, "I do not want to hear of any disagreements between Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston."

The Frenchman opened his eyes, and the corners of his moustaches rose perceptibly.

"*Bien, mademoiselle,* as you will ; but your sister will tell you, and everybody at Rookstone will tell you also, that Mr. Wolferston is a change man. No one know what 'ave 'appen to him ; but since a week he is more extraordinary than I can say ;

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he suspec' everything ; he suspec' madame and he suspec' me too, and suddenly yesterday he tell to me to pack everything he shall be able to want for several months, and to come in France with him."

"To France!" exclaimed Janet, but the Frenchman went on.

"Well, I was ver' much surprise, and we was all surprise. I do not think madame wish for to go, for I see her always crying. Yesterday, but just as we go in train, Mr. Wolferston leave her for one moment, and she beckon me. 'Leroux,' she say, 'as soon as we shall arrive in London, you will go to my sister in Vincent Square, and you will tell to her to come to me to-morrow morning, at eight o'clock, at the hotel we go to.'"

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“And where is she now?”

“We are all in a hotel in Cavendish Square—a very dull place, I think, for London.”

“Stay”—while she spoke Janet had opened her desk—“I will just send my sister word that I am coming.”

In her excitement at Leroux’s tidings, she had entirely forgotten Richard’s prohibition. She wrote a few hasty lines to her sister, and Leroux departed with them. He could not tell her how long his master meant to remain in London, but he said he fancied Mr. Wolferston must have some business to transact before he could start for France.

When he was gone, it seemed to Janet as if she were in a dream. Was Mary a

prisoner, being carried off against her will ? and what had happened to Richard to cause the change Leroux spoke of ? She remembered Richard's prohibition now, but she no longer heeded it. It seemed to her that if Mary, loving her husband as she did, could send for her in this secret manner, she must have some urgent cause for so doing, and that she was bound to protect her at all risks.

That warm sheltering love, the germ of motherhood, which holds so large a place in some women's natures, stirred Janet's heart now so strongly, that she could not keep back her tears. It seemed as if she could hardly wait till eight o'clock to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## JANET'S NOTE.

WHAT had come to Richard? Mary had been asking herself this vainly lately, and still she could find no answer to this question.

Kitty's words on that memorable evening in the grassed road had wakened a confused and misty uneasiness, but till Mary put her doubt in words, and saw how strangely her husband was affected by it, it had not gained any strength; probably,

had she never spoken it to him, it would have withered out of existence. But ever since she had spoken she had been aware of a strange change in her husband's manner towards her—a change which seemed to have a deeper cause than her words, for it was not directed to her only. He seemed tormented by some inward anxiety which kept him ever restless, ever watchful over the movements of those among whom he lived. He rarely left his wife, but he seemed to take no pleasure in her companionship ; he sat silent for hours, and if he did leave her he always reappeared suddenly, as if he wanted to take her by surprise. Was he fretting for the loss of his child ? Mary asked herself ; but in other ways he gave no sign of this. She noticed, too, how he

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watched the movements of the servants. Once she found him at her writing-desk diligently examining its contents, and she would have paid no heed to this but for her husband's sudden start of alarm, as if he had been caught in the commission of some crime.

She longed to ask what ailed him, but ever since the birth of her child she had learned to fear her husband. He was rarely angry with her, but she knew what his anger would be, and she shrank from rousing it. Besides, since her last appeal about Janet, there had been a reserve between them which seemed to poor Mary impassable.

At last he told her his intention of taking her to France ; she remonstrated, but he took no notice.

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Then for the first time since their marriage Mary felt rebellious.

"I cannot go, Richard ; it would break my heart to leave baby's grave."

Even then he turned coldly away.

"You do not know what is good for you ?" he said, gloomily ; "you are fretting yourself to death here, change is absolutely necessary for you."

She protested, but he was deaf, and she left the home of her childhood, and of her married life also, weeping passionate tears—tears whose bitterness lay in the distrust her husband felt towards her.

As yet the doubt Kitty's words had wakened had not weakened Mary's love. Women love on even when all semblance of good is stripped from the idol they wor-

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ship ; and doubtless this blind clinging love has done as much in winning souls as the more severe virtue which can only love what is unstained.

Mary believed her husband was really still the same, obscured for the present by some dreadful anxiety, which he thought her, alas ! too weak and incapable to share ; but she had no patience to wait for this to clear away. She longed to question him openly ; but he had once threatened to leave her, and something told her that Richard was not a man to threaten twice.

She knew they must make some stay in London, and she resolved to see Janet ; but she decided most unwillingly that this must be effected without her husband's knowledge. He left her alone very seldom now.

However, he always breakfasted in his dressing-room, never coming down-stairs till ten o'clock, and it seemed to Mary that in a strange hotel it would be quite possible for her to see Janet quietly before her husband appeared. Janet was so wise, she would tell her what to do, and for Richard's sake she felt something must be done. She said this to herself as a reason for disobeying her husband's orders ; but Mary was longing for her sister's love—longing to pour out this overwhelming sorrow to some one who would really comfort her. She had set aside and neglected the safe ways in which she had been reared ; now in sorrow she longed to return to them, not so much from repentance as from a secret foreknowledge of the comfort they would bring.

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"Janet has always been so good and religious," she said ; "the very look of her will give me help."

And then, as we know, she had watched her opportunity, and beckoning Leroux to the railway carriage, had given him the message for her sister.

She was sitting now with Janet's reply in her hand. Richard had only just left her to smoke a cigar, and although Leroux had returned some time ago, he had not before found an opportunity to deliver Janet's note to his mistress.

Blunted as Mary's perceptions of right and wrong doing had become during the past year, a quick flush rose on her cheek as the man gave her the note. Richard might be harsh to her, but was not this a

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deliberate act of deceit? But a blunted conscience or a stifled one is soon hushed. It was for a good purpose that she wanted to see Janet; both her husband and herself would be happier afterwards for the advice and guidance she should be sure to get from her sister.

She read the note again. Janet said she hoped to be in Cavendish Square next morning punctually at eight o'clock; there was actually nothing else to be gleaned from the note, except a few loving epithets; but they were sweet comfort to the poor soul. Just now Mary hungered for love, and she read her sister's tender words over and over again, and kissed and wept over them.

She was very, very weary. Yesterday

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had been a day of passionate sorrow and anger ; she had passed a sleepless night, and then had come the fatigue of the journey, and the wrench of leaving her baby's grave. She sat with her fair head resting on her hand, the soft waxen light falling on her lovely face, while she read Janet's letter ; and presently as she read the lines seemed to cross one over another, her head became heavier and heavier—she was fast asleep.

The door opened gently, and Richard came in. For a moment he stood looking at his sleeping wife, and if Mary had then opened her eyes, and met his look of wistful tenderness, much sorrow might have been spared her. But she did not wake ; she could not hear his tread on the rich

soft carpet as he advanced towards her. As he advanced he saw the open letter in the hand which had sunk on her lap. His face darkened instantly. A letter! How was it possible she had received one when their journey had been planned and executed with such speed? But he did not hesitate; he drew the note from between her fingers and read it. Surprise, utter, unbounded astonishment that his docile plaything of a wife was capable of conspiring against him, had an equal share with the anger that rose against her. He had been thunder-struck when at Rookstone she avowed her knowledge of her sister's visit; but then he knew that she was aware also that he had sent Janet away again. Fear of his displeasure might have produced concealment. This

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was quite different. Something in the tender words, coming from so cold a person as he considered Janet to be, assured him that Mary had complained to her sister—had appealed to her for love and protection, and an uneasy consciousness of his late coldness and neglect made itself felt. But he told himself Mary had brought that on herself by daring to question him, and as the remembrance of her words came back, his face grew darker still. How did he know the number of secret letters that had been passing, or how Mary had been watching him during these last few days. He had suspected her at Rookstone, but he had almost smiled at his own suspicions ; now they took definite shape. He knew what he dreaded, and he knew also that to avert the fulfilment of

that dread, Mary and Janet must never meet again—never, that is to say, till time and change of scene had obliterated certain memories from the mind of his wife.

While he stood there thinking, his face had hardened into the expression of a set purpose. He looked at his wife. She started, and a sob escaped her, but she did not waken. Bending over her gently, he replaced the letter as he had found it, and left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

## CHAPTER IX.

## DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE summer-like spring had been delusive—a mirage of the season which we know is too far off to be real yet; but it lasted long enough to deceive poor credulous vegetation, and the biting morning wind set the green leaves shrivelling, in the vain hope that by curling up their edges they could protect themselves from the fierce enemy; not they, the wind only laughed at their efforts, and scared all

verdure out of them ; and then, content with what he had done to the trees in Cavendish Square, he dashed away into the Regent's Park in search of young fruit blossoms, and finding some anxious to appear in the world before their time, he cut them off with his sharp breath, and left them dying on the black cold ground.

Janet shivered as she stepped out of a cab—at the hotel to which Leroux had directed her. She heard the clocks striking eight as she passed into the entrance hall.

Presently a servant appeared.

“Can I see Mrs. Wolferston ?”

“I'll see, ma'am,” and the waiter, who, looking as if he were only just awake, disappeared again.

He soon returned.

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"Mrs. Wolferston is not here, ma'am, they left quite early this morning."

"Gone ! This morning !" Janet felt so stunned that she did not know what to say next.

"Yes, ma'am, for the continent, I believe."

"Do you know if they left any letter or message ?"

"I'll inquire, ma'am, if you will wait one moment," and he showed her into a small waiting-room.

Gone ! what could this mean ? and then it flashed upon Janet that Richard had discovered her intended visit, and had taken this means of preventing a meeting between her and her sister. But why should he be at such pains to keep them apart ? and then, as she remembered Mary's blind devotion

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to her husband, it seemed to her that matters must be greatly changed between them before her sister would send for her against his wishes; for Janet had quite comprehended that the intended meeting of this morning was to have been kept from Richard's knowledge. Something deeper lay under this sudden flight. She tried to think over all that Leroux had said yesterday.

The waiter came back.

"There is no note or message left, ma'am. Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston and their man servant—the lady brought no maid with her—left here this morning to catch the tidal train at Charing Cross. Their luggage was addressed 'Paris.'"

The mechanical precision of the waiter's news fell like lead upon Janet's heart.

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There was no use in staying any longer. The cab was waiting, and Janet went back in it to Vincent Square. A deep dark fear had taken hold of her.

Had Mary reason to suspect that which she herself suspected ? Had she also seen the fatal will which had stirred up so much sorrow and anxiety ? It seemed to her this must be so, and that her sister's anxiety to see her arose from this knowledge, and from her terror at finding herself in possession of such a secret. But, then, if Mary loved Richard, would she wish to betray him ? This was a question Janet dared not answer.

How strangely her mother's early prejudice against Mary's marriage was vindicating itself, and how bitterly her own inter-



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ference on Richard's behalf was brought home to her! She prayed earnestly for her unhappy sister—prayed, too, that she herself might never be exposed to such a trial of love and truth. She reached Vincent Square before her cousins had left their bedrooms, and in the excitement and bustle of Louisa's departure for the country her morning expedition seemingly escaped the notice of even Mrs. Webb.

Louisa had just driven off, accompanied by her father, and Janet went to her own room. She wanted to think over what had happened, and to plan some means of communicating with her sister. Mr. Painsong would soon find out some trace of Mary's destination, but she could no longer consult Mr. Painsong. She must trust the matter

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to Henry ; and dearly as she loved him, Janet knew that the very qualities she prized in her lover—his outspoken frankness, his manly sincerity and horror of mystery or subterfuge, would unfit him for the task.

While she sat thinking, a letter was brought to her. The address was almost illegible, but it was written by Mary. Janet's heart gave a great bound. The excitement of the last few days was unnerving, although it strung her up into a temporary feverish excitement. There were only these few words :—

“ Dearest, follow me quickly. You will soon overtake us. Remember you promised to come whenever I asked you. I shall die if

you do not come.—MARY. Hotel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu.—This is where we went before, so I expect we shall go there now.”

The words were blotted, smeared with traces of hot tears, it was plain to Janet that her sister had been taken away by surprise, and against her will, and her indignation rose against Richard. She wrote to Henry at once at his office, begging him to come to her as soon as he could. She would explain the reason of her hasty summons when she saw him. She went out and posted the note herself. Glad of any movement or exertion, she was far too highly wrought to sit quietly, letting events take their natural course ; and even with all the tasks she set

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herself to accomplish, the hours passed slowly and heavily till the time when she might reasonably expect her lover. He might have come sooner, she knew that, but then he might have been detained ; but when an hour had gone by from the time of his expected arrival, she grew very anxious.

It was not yet four o'clock. Leaving word with the servant that if Captain Wenlock called he was to be asked to await her return, she went herself to his lodgings. In answer to her inquiry, she learned that he had that morning received a telegram, and had gone away immediately.

“ Did he leave any message for me ? ”

“ No, nothing ; only I know he won’t be back by Sunday.”

The stolid, stupefied-looking servant, who worked incessantly from morning till night, and then got about six hours' sleep in an underground kitchen—"had not seen Captain Wenlock when he went away."

If she had taken the trouble to inquire, she would have found that her mistress had a note for Miss Wolferston, a note in which Henry told her that a telegram had summoned him to Lord Fletcher without a moment's delay.

Later in the evening, when the mistress was going out, she gave this note in charge to the servant to deliver if any one should come from Miss Wolferston. In his hurry Henry Wenlock had given no directions about posting it, and in fear of a reprimand for her previous neglect of inquiry, the maid

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settled her conscience by putting the note on the fire.

Janet felt puzzled and uncertain ; it seemed to be a clear duty to follow Mary. Henry could not help her, Mr. Paison should not, and yet she could not go to Paris by herself ; she might take Thompson, but then Thompson would probably not be able to leave her business at a moment's notice ; and it was plain to Janet that if she wished to trace her sister easily she must not delay.

As she walked home debating this question with herself, a new thought occurred to her. Aunt Dawson—she was always good-natured and willing to serve any one. This certainly was not an ordinary request, but still she could make it.

She had just passed a cab-stand ; she hurried back to it, and desired to be driven to Harley Street.

It seemed to Janet as if the first steps were accomplished when she heard that Mrs. Dawson was at home.

“ Very glad to see you, I’m sure, my dear—it’s quite a coincidence ; if I hadn’t had callers, I was going to drive round and ask you to spend a few of these last *single* days with me ; eh, what do you say now ?”

Janet smiled. She felt less excited now.

“ I should like it very much, thank you ; but I have a summons to join Mary at once, and she is in Paris, and I don’t like to travel alone—it would not be quite nice, would it, aunt ?”

“ Nice ! lor no, my dear ; nice—I should

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say exceedingly nasty, not to say improper ! Why, when I was a girl, Janet, I should not have thought of going about in a cab alone ; and as to travelling, dear me ! girls have altered more than any other thing since I was young ; it seems to me they do everything that a man can do, and yet they give themselves up far more to dress and vanities than they used to do ; and as to the way they display their ankles—well, I can only hope the rising generation have well-shaped feet !”

Janet’s impatience grew uncontrollable.

“ But, aunt, I must really go to Mary ; she has lost her baby ; she is, I fear, ill and unhappy. Will you go with me ?”

Travelling was very pleasant to Mrs. Dawson, but then her travelling was

always planned and executed with considerable forethought. The planning and re-planning the route ; the diligent study of “ Murray ;” the purchase of various articles, most of which she never used ; the numerous notes of arrangement which had to pass, before all was done, between herself and the chosen friend who was to share her tour—all these little preliminaries constituted half the pleasure of the journey. She looked aghast at Janet’s sudden proposal.

“ Go with you at once, my dear; too early in the year, isn’t it ?—the equinox is hardly safely over, you know. Paris, you say. Should you want to pay a long visit, Janet ? ”

“ Oh, no, a couple of days would be quite sufficient. I don’t like troubling

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you, but—but you seem the fittest person to apply to, aunt."

"Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am ; and I certainly will go with you. But only stop two days ! Mercy, child ! do you think I'm a firework or a railway engine, to go here, and there, and everywhere, without a moment's rest ? How soon do you want to start ?"

She went through a fresh course of astonished remonstrance when Janet offered her the choice of crossing by that night's boat from Folkestone, or of waiting for the early morning train ; and finally she decided on the latter plan, with much self-condolence for the extraordinary effort she was making.

"But I was helpless," she said to her.

self when Janet had departed—"every bit as helpless as a screw in a hole that fits it ; she drove me into it whether I liked it or not, and whether I do like it now I haven't the slightest idea."

## CHAPTER X.

## PURSUIT.

MARY sat in her bed-room in the Hotel des Princes very white and trembling ; her husband had a heavier frown on his face than she had ever seen there.

It was the day after their arrival, and something in the arrangement of the house had annoyed Mr. Wolferston. He gave orders to Leroux in his wife's hearing to remove at once to another hotel.

"I will not sleep here to-night," he had said.

Mary lost all self-control ; a paroxysm of terror seized her lest she should miss Janet.

"You must stay here, Richard ; I have disobeyed you ; I have written to Janet ; if I don't see her I shall die !"

For a few moments Richard did not speak, his anger so completely overmastered him ; when he did, Mary hardly knew his voice.

"Then you really expect your sister here ?"

She could only bend her head by way of answer.

"Very well. Instead of moving to another hotel, we shall leave Paris at once. This sort of thing is intolerable. I have no

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time to say what I think of your conduct ; but you see how utterly useless it is for you to attempt to deceive me."

She hid her eyes away from his ; she could not bear the anger in his face. He left the room abruptly and summoned Leroux.

" I shall leave Paris at once."

A look of uneasiness in the man's face roused his attention.

" *Bien !* monsieur ; in one quarter of an hour all will be ready. If monsieur will tell to me the place to which we go, I will arrange for the trains and the luggage."

Richard took his time-table out of his pocket. " Rouen," he said, " that will do very well ; even if we find it too long a

journey, you and the luggage can get on to Rouen to-night."

"Ah, then, monsieur proposes to himself to make the voyage of La Normandie ; it is a beautiful country, La Normandie—*bien !* Does Monsieur know La Normandie ?"

The man's manner confirmed his master's suspicion. He felt less surprised now at the skill with which Mary had succeeded in deceiving him.

"Leroux is in Janet's pay," he thought to himself, "and between them Mary will be taught falsehood ; but I must put a stop to all this."

The carriage was soon announced. He went and fetched his wife and placed her in it. As they went towards the station, he kept looking out of window. He was

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thinking over what had happened. He determined to have no further explanation with Mary. Change of scene and new impressions would soon obliterate the remembrance of all that had caused this painful estrangement. He had cause enough for anxiety without any new bitterness of feeling, an anxiety that made him long for Mary's love as it had once been his—unquestioning worshipping love, without one cloud on its enjoyment of present happiness. The revelation in Leroux's face had added a fresh sting to his anxiety. But he had no time to sift this now. His one object was to elude Janet's pursuit, and prevent a meeting between her and Mary.

It was nearly dark, and the lamps were

all lighted. They had got into such a block of cabs and omnibuses that it was impossible to move on fast. Richard put his head out at window. Just then a cab passed, and a face in it met his gaze fully. It was Janet ! For an instant they looked at each other—and then the block of vehicles dispersed, and each carriage bore its occupant away.

Janet soon recovered herself. Her impulse was to follow Richard ; but she had not seen Mary beside him ; there was no luggage on the carriage ; he might be only going to another part of the city ; so she told the driver to go on as fast as he could to the Hotel des Princes.

“ Dear me, child, how you are exciting yourself ! ” said the unconscious Mrs. Daw-

son. "No wonder you don't grow fat. You'll never make time a minute longer by hurrying it."

Janet could not answer. The remembrance of yesterday's disappointment was still vivid, and the nearer she drew to her journey's end, the stronger her forebodings grew. When they reached the Hotel des Princes it was scarcely a surprise to hear that the English family named Wolferston had left it. She could not learn for some little time where they were bound.

At last a waiter was produced who knew all about it. "Mademoiselle is English, that is right ; she is, then, the lady to whom Monsieur Leroux send word that he is gone in Normandy."

In the midst of her anxiety Janet smiled.

But she guessed that Mary had entrusted Leroux with the task of leaving traces of her movements. She glanced at Mrs. Dawson ; the poor lady looked utterly exhausted. It would be cruel to ask her to go on travelling. It was already evening ; by sleeping in Paris and starting early next morning it seemed to Janet she might still overtake her sister.

She had left a letter for Henry with Mrs. Webb. She felt too uncertain of his movements to write to him direct, to tell him the motive of her journey and her intention of returning speedily ; but this unlooked-for accident would delay her, and she resolved to write to him again, and beg him to follow her as soon as he returned to London.

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"I do not ask you to write," she said ; "I may miss Mary again, and may have to move so rapidly from place to place that there is little chance of a letter reaching me ; and for the same reason I may possibly not write to you again, but please start as soon as you get this ; and wherever I go I will leave a note for you, to enable you to follow and overtake us easily."

And then she assured him tenderly of the comfort and help she should find in his presence. She asked him to tell Mrs. Webb not to expect to hear from her, for she foresaw that writing would be almost an impossibility.

She felt sure that Richard was purposely evading her, and her conviction of his guilt strengthened. Still, unless he feared that

she would betray him to Mary, she scarcely comprehended his motives for this avoidance.

She felt happier when she had written to Henry, and then she submitted to Mrs. Dawson's orders and took some refreshment.

While the waiter was removing the supper things Janet asked by what line of railroad people usually entered Normandy.

“Ah, *ma foi!* mademoiselle, there are different ways: if you were going on to Caen you would take train to Lisieux; but most people, above all English peoples, have the wish to see Rouen—it is a beautiful city, the finest of small cities of the world. I am of Rouen, and I assure you, mesdames, there is nothing which

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can to it be compared. Ah! but it is superb."

His patriotic enthusiasm was wasted on Janet; here was a difficulty she had not counted on, and for a little while she sat in puzzled silence.

However, the distance at last decided her; Rouen seemed so much more direct and accessible that it was not probable Richard would undertake the longer journey at such a late hour. Before she closed her letter to Henry she told him they were starting for Rouen.

The letter being closed at last, Mrs. Dawson insisted on sending her to bed.

"I should like to know what Captain Wenlock would say to me if he saw your heavy eyes and pale cheeks; he'd say I

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ought to be shaken for consenting to this mad plan of starting off again to-morrow morning. I believe I'm a sad old fool, but it is only you young people that are too much for me. Folks of my own age, indeed ; I should like to see one of them whisking me from Dan to Beersheba in such a fashion."

Janet smiled, for it was notorious that Aunt Dawson had never in her life found courage to say "No" to any one, except to two offers of marriage ; and there are no means of proving what her answer would have been even in these two instances, had the offers been spoken instead of written. It seemed due to herself to remonstrate with her niece ; but in her heart the hurry and excitement of this pursuit had an in-

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terest which quite compensated for a little fatigue.

"It's almost like a novel," she said to herself when Janet had left her ; " and just as if one was among the characters. I don't mean for a moment to say I'm so foolish as to enjoy this ; I should think not, indeed—it is only my sympathy with poor dear Janet. Strange thing it is how people are mismatched in this life, as Mrs. Webb says —she's always so sensible, Mrs. Webb—a little too much so, perhaps, but you never catch her saying or doing anything foolish or enthusiastic. It really does seem to me that Captain Wenlock was far better suited to either Mary Wolferston or Louey Webb than to Janet ; she's too good for him, and he's not clever enough for her ; she'd have

done better for that dark-eyed cousin of her father's ; though, mercy me, I could never have had the courage to marry that man if I'd been a girl ; he looks like what I should fancy a brigand might be, or a pirate captain, or one of those sort of book people."

By this time Mrs. Dawson had finished putting up all the iron-grey ringlets in paper, and having carefully encased them in a trebly-frilled nightcap, and looked at the whole performance in the glass, she went to bed.

When Richard Wolferston reached the railway station he beckoned Leroux, who was standing near the luggage.

"I am not going to Normandy ; I have engaged a carriage to take us on to Meudon ; you can bring what is wanted, and

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leave the heavy luggage here to be sent for."

Something in his master's face told Le-roux that he was suspected, and without any attempt at delay he gave the necessary directions, and was soon on his way to Meudon with Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston.

## CHAPTER XI.

**MRS. WEBB MAKES THE BEST USE OF HER  
TIME.**

MRS. WEBB, as has been seen, was a manœuvring woman ; a woman who preferred the little crooked turnings and byways to the straight high-road of truth ; and yet if circumstances had not, so to speak, played into her hands, she might have hesitated to plan and scheme out for herself her present conduct.

When a letter from Captain Wenlock to

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Janet reached her, she hesitated what to do with it, but after losing a post she sent it on to Hotel des Princes.

Early on the second day Louisa returned. Scarlet fever had declared itself in the village near which she was staying, and although her friends assured her she would run no risk by remaining, she preferred, as she said, "to take care of herself."

Mr. and Mrs. Webb were engaged to dine with an old friend. They came home early. There were lights in the drawing-room, and when Mrs. Webb asked if her daughter was sitting up for them, she was told that Captain Wenlock was there. It was such a pleasant bit of news, that she quite forgot to be surprised that her well-

trained Louey should receive gentlemen in her mother's absence.

Mrs. Webb hurried up-stairs. For the moment she really forgot the note Janet had left in her charge, and as if Captain Wenlock, too, were in a conspiracy against her memory, he did not ask a single question relative to Janet.

Louisa had told him, as her mother had told her, that her cousin was with Mrs. Dawson, Janet having settled with Mrs. Webb that her journey in search of Mary was not to be mentioned to any one except Henry.

Captain Wenlock had come direct from the railway-station to Vincent Square ; he had arrived there about an hour before Mrs. Webb's return, and when Louisa told

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him of Janet's absence, he felt so sure that he should find a letter from her at his lodgings that he did not care to ask questions about her from the Webbs.

Lately, if he could possibly avoid it, he never mentioned Janet's name to Mrs. Webb.

Next morning's post brought a letter to Vincent Square, addressed, in Janet's handwriting, to Captain Wenlock. Mrs. Webb was alone in the room when the letters were brought in, and she put this one in her pocket.

"If I'm to keep this absurd business a secret from Louey," she said, "I must not let her see the Paris post-mark."

Louey came down to breakfast, bright, animated, happy, quite unlike the dull

listless girl of the past two months. She talked incessantly of Henry Wenlock, and of what he had said to her.

"He is coming to-night, mamma, to try a new song I have brought from the country; he has such a charming voice;" and then she gave a silly little sentimental sigh, and drooped her head gracefully.

"How lovely she is," thought the fond mother. "No wonder he admires her. There must have been something special in his manner last night, for my Louey is not the sort of girl to fancy a man's admiration when it's all on her own side, dear me, no."

The day wore on. Louisa's spirits were unflagging, and towards evening she was

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plainly under the excitement of expectation.

"Poor child!" her mother thought; "I'm afraid she is really attached to him, and yet why should I fear such a thing? Louey would never care really for a man unless he cared for her. Have I not always said that it was only duty that held Henry to Janet? If these two are left to themselves for a week, I believe he will see the fearful sacrifice he is contemplating."

And then she stood thinking.

Janet's first note lay safely in her desk, and the other letter was still in the pocket of her morning gown. Must she give them to Captain Wenlock, or should she wait the result of the evening? If he really seemed happy with Louisa, why should she dis-

turb his enjoyment by the mention of Janet ?

Mrs. Webb had been deceitful, and spiteful, and worldly. She had allowed many tall weeds to grow unchecked for years, but a deliberate act of dishonesty was new to her. Her conscience spoke out loudly, and she hesitated, and then the evil powers to whose dominion she had yielded with so little struggle spoke out louder still. She stood there hesitating, and as she hesitated a compromise suggested itself.

“ I see my way plain now,” she said to herself. “ I shall put both letters in my pocket ; but there can certainly be no occasion to produce them until he asks about Janet.”

She gave a sigh of relief, and took both letters down-stairs with her.

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She sat longer than usual with her husband, after dinner ; even when she heard Henry Wenlock arrive, she did not at once go up-stairs.

By the time she reached the drawing-room he was at the pianoforte, trying over new songs with Louisa.

“ And really they look so perfectly happy together, I have no heart to interrupt them.”

She took up her embroidery. She was indefatigable at needlework.

Captain Wenlock came and spoke to her when the song was finished, but he said not one word of Janet. Louisa stayed at the piano, singing.

“ Won’t you come and try some duets ? ” she said, when her song was over.

He went to the piano again. He was glad to get away from Mrs. Webb. He did not want to speak of Janet. He was both vexed and puzzled about her. It seemed to him that eccentricity might be carried too far, and that her present conduct was inexplicable.

He had called at Mrs. Dawson's, and had learned that she was out of town with Miss Wolferston, but was expected home in a day or two. What could Janet's silence mean? When he reached Vincent Square that evening, he asked Louisa what had become of Christy, and learned that he had started that morning for the seaside with Thompson.

He felt hurt and depressed; but he loved music passionately, and it was a real plea-

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sure to sing to any one who admired and understood his voice as Louisa did. She was so kind, too, humouring his mood—keeping on singing and playing, instead of expecting him to talk. He had had no idea how nice she was : hitherto she had seemed to him frivolous and silly, but it was impossible to think this now ; and when he bade her “good-night,” his eyes were full of gratitude.

“ Come again soon, and get that last song perfect,” she said, in a gentle, earnest voice ; and he thought what a dear little unselfish girl she was, to devote herself in this way to his amusement and improvement.

He was going, when a thought suddenly occurred to him.

“ Did you forward a letter I wrote to Janet ?” he said to Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb flushed slightly. "Yes, I forwarded it."

"Thank you ; good-night," and he went away, leaving his hostess much relieved, and very grateful to have been spared the necessity of producing the letters ; for she had decided during the evening that unless he showed curiosity to know what had become of Janet, she might keep her own counsel.

If she had quite understood Henry Wenlock, she would not have feared his questioning. He would have submitted to any torture of doubt or vexation, rather than he would permit Mrs. Webb to see that he was displeased with Janet, or ignorant of her movements. He went away more and more perplexed, but he hoped to find a

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letter at his lodgings. There was no use in any self-torment. He had had a very pleasant evening ; Louey was a nice amiable little girl, and what a charming voice she had !

He reached his lodgings, hurried upstairs, but when he had struck a light there was no letter to be seen. What could it mean, unless Janet had returned that evening ?

“ I shall go to Mrs. Dawson’s again tomorrow, and then if she is not back I shall wait a couple of days. If I have no news by that time, I must make up my mind to cross-question Mrs. Webb. I hope I may be spared this necessity.”

## CHAPTER XII.

*AT MONT DORE.*

FOR the first few days Mary gave herself up to passionate sorrow, and then came a sort of resigned sullenness, but her husband seemed not to resent either. He wanted the subject of Janet dismissed, and he was resolved not to say a word which might revive it. He had cause enough for anxiety just now, without the unhappy estrangement that had grown up between himself and Mary.

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He knew well enough he had only to speak out plainly to effect a complete reconciliation ; but if he did this, Mary might repeat the question which had so wounded him. No, he must endeavour to bury the past out of sight without any spoken reference to it.

He wanted Mary's love again as it had once been his. He was devoted and tender ; but her sorrow did not yield as he hoped it would have yielded.

They stayed a week at Fontainebleau, and then he proposed to return to Paris, for he felt sure that if Janet failed to find them in Normandy she would go back to England, but when he made this proposal to Mary she shrank from the noise and bustle of the great city.

He thought he would try the effect of constant change of scene. He took her to Bourges with the intention of exploring Auvergne, but Mary found no interest in the quaint old citizen palaces so full of memories of the most disastrous period of French history. Even when they reached Auvergne, the wild picturesque scenery of that region of extinct volcanoes seemed lost on her.

At times Richard grew impatient of her silent apathy, but a glance at her sweet face checked him. She was no longer sullen or unloving. There was at times so wistful an anxiety in her eyes that he could scarcely keep from questioning her.

It was a fortnight since they quitted Paris. They were staying at Mont Dore-les-bains. In the morning Mary had been

out riding with her husband ; they had returned to the hotel, and were just going downstairs to dinner, when she suddenly fainted.

Her husband was terribly alarmed ; he had a horror of foreign doctors, and there was no English one to be had.

He told his wife, as soon as she was somewhat recovered, that she had over-fatigued herself. She looked at him earnestly.

“ No, it is not that, Richard. I want to be at home again.”

He kissed her and soothed her with tender words, but he gave her no promise of returning.

Later in the day, when they were sitting out in the charming promenade beside the river, she recurred to the subject.

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“Richard, I cannot stay here. This place, I know, is full of beauty, but it oppresses me. All these strange rents and fissures in the mountains—the mountains themselves, with their weird, barren summits and wooded sides—are so unreal, so unlike all I have been used to! If you will not take me to England, let me at least go nearer the coast.”

She looked beseechingly at him, but she saw no yielding in his face.

“This is mere waywardness,” he said. “As long as you are in France it cannot signify what part of the country you are in. I did not think you so fanciful, darling.”

“I think it is more than a fancy, Richard; it is a longing, an impulse I can

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no longer resist. You yourself settled to go to Normandy when we left Paris. I see that in more than one Norman town there are English residents, and consequently"—she hesitated, and nervous fear of his anger checked the words on her tongue, but the overmastering impulse bore her on. "I must say it, dearest, even if you think me foolish; I might find an English church and an English clergyman there."

He turned away, but she clasped both hands round his arm; she knew he could not break away from her before so many witnesses; for although the seats were widely separated there were several of the hotel visitors on the promenade.

"Oh, Richard, if you could know how utterly miserable I am, how strangely and

awfully my wickedness and weakness have been brought before me, you would let me go to church again."

He was very angry ; she knew that by his frown and his silence. But if Mary had understood human nature better she would have taken comfort from this very anger ; she would have known that where anger is there is inward combat, and she would have thought it a far more healthful and hopeful sign than the cold sneering cynicism with which Richard had hitherto repressed any earnest feeling.

"Come down by the river-side," she said, "we shall be alone there," and she walked on. He followed her, spite of himself. He was surprised at this new development of his wife's mind ; she was no longer the

docile child he had married, and yet he felt he loved her more dearly than ever.

“But I am not going to yield to a fit of fanatical enthusiasm,” he said; “if Mary once turns canting, all hope of peace between us is over. I will have no parsons coming preaching reformation to me; not one of them shall ever set foot in my house—they only come to beg—a pack of lazy, canting hypocrites.”

They were alone again now, close to the bridge, and the frowning summit of the Capucin rock seemed to be bending forward to look at them. Mary stopped, and waited for her husband to come up to her.

“Richard, I have not told you all, I could not before those people; but ever

since baby died I have been thinking why he was taken from me, and I know now—it has come to me so clearly, so convincingly, that I am sure it is the truth ; he was taken from me for two reasons—one was my great sin, my wilful disbelief of my mother's warnings, and then my weakness in giving up all she had taught me ; and the other"—the tears rained down so fast that she could no longer see her husband's face—" the other was a mercy sent me—he was taken away, darling, because I had no power to train him rightly ; he has been spared from growing as weak and wicked as I am."

Her husband put his arm round her.

" You are not wicked, Mary. I will not have you call yourself so ; and even sup-

posing you were wicked, had I no part in the child, or have you learned to consider me so great a reprobate that you feel thankful he has no chance of growing up in my steps?"

She hid her eyes on Richard's shoulder. She knew the answer he expected to this appeal, and yet she could not make it. She only repeated her request to be taken to Normandy.

Suddenly it flashed upon him that she guessed Janet had gone there to look for her, and the suspicion that she was still pining after her sister steeled him against any yielding.

"No, Mary, I look upon all this as mere weakness, probably increased by your illness this morning. I shall not take you to

Normandy ; and even if we were there, don't imagine for an instant that I'll have any cant or nonsense in my house. I am just as I always was, so you have no cause of complaint. If you choose to alter, that is not my business. Come, the damp is rising from the river ; you ought to have been indoors half an hour ago."

But Mary had conquered the first, the most difficult part of her request, the speaking it at all ; she was not now going to yield hope easily.

"Richard, I must either go back to Rookstone, or you must take me to Normandy." He shook his head. "If you will not do either," she said, very earnestly, "I must think you are wronging me, and I shall try to find Janet ; I

shall write to her to come to me at once."

Richard had to struggle hard for self-control ; he had turned round at her words and grasped both her hands in his ; but she stood fearless, her lovely blue eyes bent on him full of mingled love and sorrow, and yet there was in her whole attitude an expression of earnest purpose he had never seen in her before. He felt instinctively that his anger might frighten her, but that it could exercise no restraining power.

"I will never help you to see Janet."

And then he drew her arm into his, and they walked homewards, both of them silent ; Mary because she found no words to urge her petition, so entirely had her

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pleading exhausted her, and Richard because he dared not trust himself to speak, lest a few cruel words might shatter the love he had been trying to rebuild during these past days.

Just as they reached one of the quaintly piled-up masses of Roman *débris* in the promenade, a French gentleman who had walked and talked with Richard on the previous day came up.

“Ah, Monsieur Wolferston, will you do to me a great service? I have here a letter from England on business—important business, monsieur; and I regret to say to you that I cannot arrive to comprehend that properly. If madame will permit—” and bowing and flourishing his hat about six times more than was necessary, the French-

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man placed himself beside Richard, and pulled the letter from his pocket.

“ Go on slowly, and I will overtake you, Mary.”

She moved away ; she was so very hopeless, so despairing, that it seemed to her she did not care what became of her.

She had gone on a little way ; a man was standing just behind another of the ruin heaps, and she started at coming upon him so suddenly. It was Leroux.

He had heard of her illness in the morning, and seeing her now turn quite pale, he feared she was going to faint again.

“ What is it, madame ?”—he raised his hat respectfully—“ will you lean against this ruin ?”

“ No, thank you,” she said, faintly ; but

she stood still, for the sudden fright had set her heart beating wildly. "Leroux," she said, for the man stood still also, looking as if he expected her to faint, "when we left Paris, did you say we were going to Normandy?"

"But yes, madame, I had supposed no other thing."

"And do you think if—if you were to go off to Normandy, you would find my sister there?"

Leroux glanced quickly at her: she was very pale, but her eyes glittered with excitement. He shrugged his shoulders, and rubbed his white hands.

"Ah ça, madame, what will you? I can go to Normandy to-morrow if you will, and perhaps I may find Mees Janet, perhaps

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not ; how can I say it ? but the result will be the same. Monsieur will be angry with me, and do you think, madame, he will let you see mademoiselle, your sister ?” He snapped his fingers at such a manifest absurdity. “ No, madame ; all he will do, he will run away more fast than ever, and leave mademoiselle plantée là ; but, madame, all the same for that, I will go to Normandy and make the search you desire. Never was it said of François Leroux that he refuse for any fear of man to obey the order of a lady !”

Neither of them had heard approaching footsteps, and at Leroux’s last words Richard stood beside them.

“ Stay here till I come back,” he said to Leroux ; and then, taking his wife’s hand

and drawing it through his arm, he led her silently to the entrance of the inn, and told her to go up to her room at once.

Then he went back to Leroux.

“ You are a spy, I find—an untrustworthy scoundrel ; tell me what I owe you, and never let me see your face again.”

It was well for Leroux that the place they stood in was not unfrequented ; all the pent-up anger which Mary had kindled in her husband burst its bonds now.

The man was scared as he looked in his master’s face ; but still he could not submit tamely to this insult.

“ I am not a scoundrel, Mr. Wolferston ; if you had no secrets you would not be always in suspect. A spy ! people who have nothing to conceal do not fear spies.”

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And then he walked away. Something in Richard's eyes warned him he had said enough. In another half-hour the Frenchman had received his wages, and had departed. He knew that it would be useless to try to see Mrs. Wolferston ; compassion for her, and still more anger against his master, determined him to find her sister without any loss of time.

## CHAPTER XIII.

*LEROUX'S JOURNEY.*

LEROUX started for Paris that night. Till now he had not disliked his master. Mr. Wolferston's altered manner had been very irritating ; but Leroux could have borne unkind treatment better than hard words. It was derogatory to be called a spy and a scoundrel ; it had roused the tiger-blood inherent in some Frenchmen, and he vowed not to rest till he had taken revenge on Richard

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Wolferston. He was resolved to find Mademoiselle Janet ; he was sure she would repay his expenses, still he must not be extravagant. He travelled all night, he got a hasty and cheap meal in Paris, and then went on to Rouen, tired as he was. His body was tired, but he had kept his brains awake by occasional cups of strong coffee.

It seemed to him that the only way of tracing Janet would be to represent himself as a police emissary, and thus to gain a sight of the visitors' book at the different hotels. He did not find much difficulty in doing this ; but he visited three of the principal inns in Rouen, and searched diligently through the arrivals of the past month, without finding any trace of Miss

Wolferston. At the fourth hotel he tried a new system. He began to be afraid of identifying himself too much in one character in Rouen, he might draw the observation of the police on him. When he presented himself at this fourth inn, he thought, from its quiet, well-to-do appearance, that it was the most probable of any to afford the information he wanted—he merely announced himself in search of some friends—English ladies.

His notion was that if Miss Wolferston had followed her sister, she had come abroad alone with Thompson, for he had heard that English young ladies were far more independent than French ones; but still he would not commit himself to the description “a lady and her maid.”

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At this hotel he asked to see the proprietor himself, and a stout, blue-eyed Norman came out of a little side room into the entrance passage,—

“English ladies,—we have so many of them, monsieur.”

“But these must have been here, there is a fortnight; one of them, a young lady, not tall, named Wolferston. I am sure that she has been here.”

The Norman’s bold bald forehead wrinkled.

“English names are neither to be pronounced nor remembered,” he said, and then he shrugged his shoulders, and added, “but what will you?”

Leroux paused. He had made up his mind to find traces of Janet here, and the

man had not positively affirmed that he knew nothing about her.

"Is her name in your book?" he said.  
"She would of course write that herself."

"Mais oui," answered the host, with the peculiar Norman twang which is so unmistakable. "Monsieur can accompany me into the salle, and there it is probable we shall find the book."

Leroux could hardly restrain his eagerness while the Norman's fat fingers travelled slowly down the pages ; his mercurial Parisian temperament prompted him to look for himself, but he thought it might create suspicion to do this unasked.

"Here is an English name—what barbarous names this people has."

The Norman pointed to Mrs. Dawson's,

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about half-way down the column he had been examining.

Leroux bent down instantly ; it seemed to him magical, when just below the name to which the Norman pointed, he read that of Janet Wolferston.

“ La voilà ! it is she, that is exactly the lady that I seek for. Is she here now ?”

“ We have no one who has been in the house a fortnight ; I do not remember this lady, but at that period I think our visitors seldom stayed more than a night.”

Leroux’s eyes had travelled across the page, and he saw that though these names were entered as arriving from Paris, the place to which they were going was left blank. He was as wise as he was before ; he had come to Rouen for nothing but the

satisfaction of knowing that Janet had really been there.

The Norman was kind-hearted, spite of his reserve, and the blank disappointment in Leroux's face touched him.

"I do not talk to English ladies, monsieur," he said, smiling; "I do not understand their language, and the way they speak French is tiresome to me; but my wife, Madame Le Petit, she speaks English, and she likes to speak it, so she always talks all she can to foreigners; I will ask her to speak to you of these ladies."

Madame appeared in a well-fitting black dress, and a muslin cap trimmed with blue; she was not pretty, but she had an indescribable charm of manner and appearance

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which betrayed to Leroux that she came from the capital.

His heart warmed to her at once, and he proceeded to question her about Miss Wolferston ; he described Janet's appearance minutely, for Madame Le Petit had also shaken her head at the idea that she was likely to remember an English name.

When he came to the description of her face, madame's eyes brightened.

“ *Mais-oui-oui-oui*, very certainly yes, monsieur ; I have it now : a face and head of cameo—is it not so ?—and a small person and blue eyes. Bah ! I have been expecting you this long time, monsieur ; but I thought you would be English ; and, pardon, but you are not the person I imagined *mademoiselle* meant.”

In his utter surprise, Leroux had nearly denied the possibility that Janet had described him, but he had lived a life of too much adventure to be easily thrown off his balance.

"Mademoiselle has then mentioned me to you?"

"But yes"—she felt in her pocket—"Bon, I must look in my armoire, it will be put away there. But mademoiselle gave to me a letter for the gentleman which should inquire for her."

A letter! He contented himself with a bow; while madame trotted up-stairs again. He dared not speak, for fear of compromising in some way the false character he was representing.

Miss Wolferston had expected a friend,

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and had left a letter for him. Bon ! In this letter she would of course have told her friend where she was going ; the friend had not come. Well, then, the letter was for Leroux—he had a right to know the movements of Miss Wolferston, when he had so important a secret to communicate to her.

It was rather disconcerting when madame reappeared with a letter in her hand to find that she had mastered the address.

“ But this is not for a French gentleman, so it is not for you, Monsieur, it is for Monsieur Wenlock.”

Leroux’s ready wit helped him now ; to take his real character would sound more probable than any invention.

“ You are right, madame, I am not Mon-

sieur Wenlock, and yet [I came for that letter ; I am the servant of Monsieur Wenlock, my master ; he is at Dieppe, and he have sent me for Miss Wolferston's letter that he may know where he is to join her. She is, as you probably have heard, making the voyage of La Normandie to find her sister. She did not find her sister here, did she ?”

“ No ; but she has demanded if a lady of her name have been here—”

“ C'est juste—it is that,” said Leroux, triumphantly ; “ her sister is married to her cousin, so they are of the same name ?”

And then, with a profusion of thanks and bows, he put the letter in his pocket, and walked away, before the black-eyed hostess had half tired of talking to him.

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“Angélique,” said her husband, gravely, “hast thou not given up that letter too easily?”

Madame was thinking so herself, but then it was quite another matter to own to her husband that she had been in the wrong, so she shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

“Ma foi ! Pierre ; go to thy accounts, my angel, and leave me to manage my affairs.”

Leroux stepped into the nearest *café*, and opened the letter. In it, as he expected, Janet told Captain Wenlock the next place to which she and Mrs. Dawson were going. He did not quite understand the letter, but still he made out that Captain Wenlock was about to become Miss

Wolferston's husband ; and it seemed to him that several sentences in it showed that the writer was very anxious to get back to London.

"I have no time to lose," he said.

He went back again to Mantes ; there he again found a letter which he appropriated ; but at Evreux, the next town to which he was directed, the mistress of the hotel was a Scotchwoman, and she gave him to understand in broad Glasgow accent, which sorely puzzled him, that he was not the person to whom the letter she had in charge was addressed. Here was a dilemma ; however, he must calculate Janet's probable route by the towns she had visited thus far.

For three days and three nights he tra-

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velled incessantly. He had the faculty of sleeping as soundly in a railway carriage as in his bed ; and although some part of the way had to be accomplished in a diligence, he managed to sleep even in that jolting progress.

At last he found himself, in the early morning, in Caen. He had visited all the large towns of Normandy, and several in Brittany. Once or twice he had again found traces of Janet and her companions, but here he was completely baffled.

Worn out and disappointed, he turned into an inn to get some refreshment. He ate and drank heartily, and when he had done this, it seemed to him that he must take some repose—he was so utterly over-powered with weariness. He sat at the

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table dozing, while the garçon cleared away the remains of his meal; and when the man asked him if he should bring coffee, he said "Yes," for the excuse of sitting still a little longer. He was soon sound asleep.

Some loud talking roused him. Two English people, a lady and gentleman, had come into the *salle* and were seated opposite to him, waiting for their breakfast.

"It is one of the most absurd notions that can come into any one's head."

"But, my dear," said the wife, fondling her little plump hands, "that is exactly why it might come into Janet Wolferston's. Mrs. Webb tells me she grows more and more eccentric."

"Well, it beats me." Mr. Buchanan settled his collar, and jingled his knife

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against a wine-glass to hurry breakfast. “I think twelve mortal hours from Havre to Southampton quite long enough, without enduring three hours beforehand in a wretched little cockle-shell of a French steamer. River passage, indeed ! I know what the mouth of a river is ; the fresh water’s uneasy at mixing with the salt, or some rubbish, and the consequence is that everybody else is made extremely uneasy.”

“I should not have recognised Janet if Mrs. Dawson had not waved her hand so vehemently at me. I was just looking round me at the Basin, and all that, and then I saw them—”

Leroux could hardly wait till the round mouth had closed, and then with many bows he begged to ask Mrs. Buchanan a few

questions. All his fatigue had vanished : his veins seemed filled with new fresh blood, as he listened to her tidings.

Miss Wolferston was on her way back to England. Mrs. Buchanan had seen her leave Caen at nine o'clock by the "Orne" steamer, bound for Havre ; but, to his joy, Leroux remembered that the steamer for Southampton did not start till nearly midnight. If he went to Honfleur by rail, and thence on to Le Havre, he could easily be in time to intercept Janet's return to Southampton, for he did not believe Miss Wolferston would go back to England if she knew her sister was still in France.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## FOUND.

MRS. DAWSON was tired out. Secretly she felt very wrathful against her companion ; but there was something in Janet's earnest, devoted love for her sister, in the uncomplaining patience with which she bore all these repeated disappointments, that subdued her aunt's discontent from much outward expression.

“ Although I think she might have known her own mind better in respect of

time ; for as to gowns, I brought but two with me—one on, one off—and with no one to brush or see to me, I'm ashamed to look at myself in the glass with my clothes on, they so stand in dust, not to speak of the unmentionable horrors which, take every care you will, gowns—the skirts of them, I should say—have a habit of contracting in travelling abroad. Oh, dear me, and bonnet strings ! I might buy new ones, to be sure, so I might ; but then Janet is so on the high stilts, thinking of nothing all day long but Mary, I do believe that if I were to ask her to go into a shop to buy bonnet strings she would think me trifling and lose her opinion of me for ever, and if I had the strings I could not sew them on without Mitchell to fix them. I wonder

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what Mitchell will think when she sees these ; they are more like haybands than ribbon, twisted into wisps, and so faded, that they are as much like dirty white as lavender. Oh, dear me, it is a comfort to think we shall be at home to-morrow. I say, Janet,"—she saw her niece approaching—“aren’t you glad we came out here ; it was just seeing that said in ‘Murray’ made me propose it, ‘Frascati, outside the walls on the seashore’—it is so pleasant, and the young trees are so lovely, and the sea looks beautiful through them, doesn’t it ? come and sit here, child, the air will do you worlds of good.”

They had left Caen that morning, and had reached Havre about twelve o’clock, and had come out to Frascati at once, as

Mrs. Dawson declared it impossible to stay in Havre. The weather was warm for the end of April, and it was very pleasant to sit out in the gardens within sight of the sea.

"I've left my tatting in that little room where we breakfasted," said Mrs. Dawson ; "or, I should say, where we looked at our breakfast. Eating after that steamboat journey was out of the question. If ever I trust myself in such another morsel of a boat as that 'Orne' steamer, I deserve to go down in it. Pigs and cows, too ! Oh, Janet, it seems a week ago ; it was dreadful to feel so ill for nothing. I shall let Mary know, some day, the list of sufferings I have gone through for her—dear me, dear me !"

Mrs. Dawson went away to find her tatting.

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sea ; she felt very unhappy. Had she done all she could ? Was she not giving up this search because she could no longer bear Henry's silence, rather than because she had no hope of finding her sister ? She did not know. She was ready to give up her own life, her own happiness entirely, if she could bring Mary's husband to confess the truth about the will, and her sister's beseeching words had inspired her with the conviction that Mary too suspected Richard. But though this conviction and obedience to her mother's dying words had led her on thus earnestly, Henry's obstinate silence was very hard to bear.

For several days after leaving Paris Janet had not written to him, in the hope that he had returned to London and would

follow her when he received the note she had left for him ; but when day after day of her fruitless quest passed away, and Henry neither came nor wrote, her heart grew sadly heavy, and it became very hard work to pursue her inquiries for her sister with the same zeal with which she had begun them. Had she been alone it would have been an easier task, but Mrs. Dawson, although very kind, was a wearisome companion from her perpetual questioning.

Besides this, and the weariness of actual fatigue, Janet was heart-sick too from constant disappointment. Here and there she had got a glimmer of hope ; but this had soon proved fallacious. She had not found decided proof of Mary's presence in any of the towns she had visited. And now, as

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she sat looking out over the sea, she confessed to herself that she had spent all this time in a fruitless search for her sister; and meantime she had deeply offended Henry. She had written to him twice within the last few days, and asked him to write to her at Havre; but they had inquired to-day at the post-office without success.

She must go home, she had no right to grieve and wound him thus; and yet in every letter she had asked his sanction to her journey.

She had suspected Richard Wolferston of fraud; but it never occurred to her to suspect Mrs. Webb's honesty in the matter of delivering her own letters to Henry Wenlock. The greatest comfort she could

give herself was, that she might have missed his letters on the road.

Once she thought of writing to Mrs. Webb to explain her continued absence and to ask for news ; but she could not bring herself to confess to her cousin that she had not received one letter from Henry since her departure. However it was over now, she should be in London to-morrow morning.

A flock of school-girls came trooping back from the beach ; happy, bright-faced creatures, who looked as if the genial sunshine, flooding the garden and burnishing the wide-spreading sea into a sheet of trembling gold, was their natural element.

Janet sighed as they passed her, they reminded her of Mary.

“ I have found you at last, mademoiselle.”

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Janet started. Leroux was standing beside her, he had come out of the hotel while she sat watching the young girls.

She was too much surprised to speak, and there was no need ; Leroux was eager to tell his story.

“ Mademoiselle, I ’ave been following you every day, till I ’ave lost my ’ope, and I begin to think you were gone to London ; but this morning at Caen I hear certain news, and I ’ave come as fast as possible. Madame Wolferston ’ave asked me to go and bring you to her, and I ’ave promised I will do so, and then Mr. Wolferston become very angry, and I leave him and madame at Mont Dore-les-Bains, which is in Auvergne, mademoiselle, so—so far off ; and then I have voyaged day and

night too : I never stop till I find you to give you the message of madame."

Janet listened attentively.

" Then do you think if we were to leave this place at once I should find my sister at Mont Dore ?"

Leroux looked at her for a moment with keen disappointment.

" Ma foi !" he said to himself ; " what egotists are these English ! She does not say ' Thank you a hundred times, Leroux ; ' or ' What can I do to recompense the zeal and perseverance you have shown ? ' She but asks for her sister ; it is insupportable." Then aloud, " Ah, mademoiselle, I do not think it ; monsieur will at once guess that I shall bear you the message of his wife, and he will travel quickly from Auvergne."

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“ Well, then, what is to be done ? ”

Janet did not say this as if she were helpless and needed counsel. A look in the Frenchman’s face told her he had yet more to communicate.

Leroux bowed ; it soothed his wounded self-love to be appealed to.

“ Mademoiselle will return to Paris, and stay there ; and I will go along with her and watch the railway station for Auvergne. I am sure that Madame Wolferston cannot voyage quickly, and I do not think they will reach the capital before to-morrow ; but mademoiselle, if I could be sure of seeing you alone and not ‘aving some interruption, there is a secret of importance I will confide to you.”

It seemed to Janet that already this man

had been admitted too freely to the confidence both of herself and her sister. She answered very stiffly :

“ Anything you have to say can be said here ; but if the secret concerns your late master, I had rather not hear it.”

She looked round anxiously for Mrs. Dawson, but the poor lady was still in the sitting-room seeking her tiny fragment of tatting under a heap of hats and railway rugs. Leroux looked for a moment before he answered.

“ Mees Wolferston,” he said, and a very sarcastic smile curved his moustaches, “ you are a very good young lady indeed, and you think all the world is good like yourself. Bon! it is pleasant for young ladies to think so ; but, mademoiselle, if you think it is to

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tell you where is your sister I come all this long way, from Auvergne to Paris, from Paris to Normandie—and, mademoiselle, if I had not this morning found you, I had also gone from Normandie to London—you make a mistake, the most great mistake of your life. No, Mees Wolferston, I 'ave been insult—insult in a manner which is insupportable to my honour"—he tapped his chest vehemently, and drew himself to his full height—"and the person who 'ave insult me is not an honest man as I am, no, mademoiselle ; he is an impostor, a thief; he 'ave taken to himself the inheritance of others."

"Good gracious me, Janet, what is all this rhodomontade this man is saying?"

Leroux had seen Mrs. Dawson coming

down the steps of the verandah into the garden ; but he felt what he was saying far too deeply to be stopped by any scruple of being overheard. His great fear had been that Janet would rise up and go away before he ended. He gave her no chance of replying to Mrs. Dawson ; he pulled a roll of paper out of his pocket, and handed it to Miss Wolferston.

“I make no accusation I cannot prove, there is the proof of what I have said.” He said this rapidly in French, then he folded his arms as only a Frenchman can, and stood looking at Janet.

She was very pale, for she had at once guessed what it was that she held in her hand—the fatal will, which had hastened her mother’s death ; but, with all the recol-

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lections that crowded back on her, she did not lose her presence of mind, nor her memory of Mr. Painsong's words, that Richard Wolferston was not a man to be driven by any publicity to confess the fraud, if he had committed it.

"Indeed," she said. "Aunt Dawson, this person has business to settle with me. You can follow me," she said to Leroux, and she walked quietly along the garden to a bench opposite the one on which she had been sitting.

## CHAPTER XV.

*AT CAEN.*

“ COULD we not stay here another night, Richard ? I feel so weak and tired, I am sure it would be best.”

“ Impossible, you must not give way, and you will soon feel all right again ; we shall not travel for several days after we come to our next resting-place. You were all anxiety to get to Normandy last week.”

Richard Wolferston spoke harshly ; he had not forgiven his wife’s last endeavour

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to see her sister in spite of him ; and yet he longed to be at peace with Mary ; he was more unhappy than she was.

Mary looked up at him, and her answer died away unspoken. How ill and changed he was ! In the four days that had passed since Leroux left them at Mont Dore, her husband had aged years. It seemed to her, as she continued to look earnestly at him, that something had happened to change him very much since he left her half an hour ago.

“ Nothing has been unpacked,” he said, and while he spoke he put a few small necessaries into the travelling-bag, “ and therefore we may as well start at once ; you will have a much better chance of a good room at Caen by arriving there early.”

It was a relief to him that Mary did not answer ; he thought she was sullen, but he had no time to soothe her or give any explanation of his sudden haste.

They had reached Paris late on the previous evening, and had left their luggage at the station.

Late in the afternoon, when he had gone down to give directions about it, he had passed Janet in the street. She had not seen him, he felt sure of that ; but although he had taken the precaution to go to a different hotel, it would be unsafe to remain in Paris, and he hastened home to Mary, and told her he meant to go on to Caen that evening.

It seemed to Richard that as Janet had doubtless gone to Normandy in search of

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them, she would not be likely to return there. He hoped she was merely passing through Paris on her way to London.

He had heard that Caen was a quiet, clean city, much less frequented by English travellers than Rouen, and that it was very healthy.

He thought of this, of everything he could snatch at, to keep his mind off the one topic, and he succeeded, till they were at last fairly on their way to Caen. Then he sank back in a corner of the carriage as weak as if he had just left a sick room. The unexpected shock of seeing Janet's face after all his care and diligence ; the suffocating sense of dread with which he remembered that if her eyes had not been turned in another direction she must have seen

him, must have known of Mary's presence in Paris, overpowered him, and made him tremble as if an ague fit had passed over him ; his hands were cold and death-like ; it seemed as if faintness were stealing over him.

He roused himself by a sudden effort, slid his hand into his travelling-bag, and pulling out a flask, took a long draught.

Mary saw him do this, and she shuddered. When first she married Richard, he had seemed to her abstemious, but lately she had remarked a change ; his manner had been strangely variable, rousing from deep gloom to feverish excitement, and she had attributed this to his frequent recourse to stimulants.

He began to recover himself. What a

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coward he was growing ! Why did he not stay and face Janet ? And yet he grew pale at the thought, and the troubled suspicion came back to his eyes—the suspicion that had made Mary so unhappy.

On that day when she had repeated to him old Kitty's words, spoken in the grassed drive, he had gone into the study and had looked for the will in the davenport. It seemed to him that Mary might have learned more from the old woman than she had repeated, and that she might share Janet's curiosity, and try to see this document.

He opened the drawer—the will was not there ; he searched for it vainly ; how could it have disappeared ? The window was still fast ; he had bolted it on the night

of Janet's visit to the study. The key, he was certain, had never left his own possession ; he examined the locks of both the doors, they did not seem to have been tampered with. He did not know where to seek, or whom to suspect.

Janet must have taken the will, and he had hurried away from England to prevent any chance of her again trying to see her sister. Lately he had suspected Mary herself.

In his secret heart he believed his wife had found the will and kept it ; and in this case he was safe, so long as he could keep her from Janet. If Janet herself had taken it, she would have put it into Mr. Paison's hands, and the old lawyer would have traced him by this time. If he could only get possession of it once more, he would let the sisters

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meet ; surely his influence must be stronger with Mary than Janet's could ever be, and life was becoming insupportable without his wife's confiding tenderness.

They did not reach Caen till late in the evening. Mary pleaded fatigue and went to bed at once. Richard had strange wild dreams, he talked incoherently. Mary was too ill to sleep, and she trembled at some of his words. What could they mean ? Old Kitty's warning came back to her with awful distinctness.

Her husband thought she was still sleeping when he left the room next morning.

He was glad of fresh morning sunshine, and pre-occupied as he was, he could not help glancing up and down the street, with its quaint gabled houses nodding at each

other from opposite sides of the way, and framing in at one end the double spires of William the Conqueror's famous cathedral-grave, and at the other the graceful tapering flèche of the beautiful church of St. Pierre.

And yet, though he was glad of the cool refreshing air, no pulse in Richard Wolferston quickened with thankfulness for any of the beauties of Nature or Art on which he gazed. The window opposite was full of delicious spring flowers, but he did not notice them. As he walked towards the cathedral, here and there in the busy thoroughfare he caught glimpses, through low stone-browed iron gates, of luxuriant gardens, gay with the exquisite apple-blossoms of Normandy. But he was dead, insensible to all; the beauties of Nature

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came as his dinner came ; he never troubled himself as to the special cause any more than he returned heart-felt thanks for daily food and clothing.

He was discontented with life ; all he had thought most worth having had, like the blackberries the child sees on the hedge-top, dwindled as soon as reached. Was it possession, he asked himself, that tarnished everything ? or was it that his idea of happiness and enjoyment was more extensive than the world had power to satisfy ? He had come strangely near the truth, and something in this last thought pressed so strongly on his mind that he had to make an effort to get rid of it.

He walked rapidly back to the inn.

The entrance passage led into a large

courtyard, round which ran an open bedroom gallery ; a white-capped femme de chambre was leaning over the balustrade of this as he came in from the street.

“ Monsieur, monsieur,” she called out, “ come here at once, you are wanted.”

He rushed up the staircase, and the woman went on before him, and opened the door of Mary’s room.

She lay on the bed white as death.

“ What is it, my darling ?” he said, vehemently. “ What has happened to you ? what have you been doing ?”

He looked round ; the landlady and an old woman were standing near the bed.

“ Oh, Richard, are you come ?” said Mary, faintly.

The women went away, the elder one warning him to be careful and quiet.

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Then he guessed how it was with his wife, and he cursed his own imprudence in exposing her to so much fatigue.

She lay so still, so very white, her eyes closed.

She opened them presently. "I have been very ill, darling. Darling"—she tried to speak more earnestly—"there is a curse upon us, we shall never have a living child. Oh, Richard, if you saw the terror I am in at the thought of dying here alone, you would bring a clergyman to see me." The terrified expression in her eyes shocked him.

"My darling, you are not alone, am not I here?" So helpless a look came on her face that he was cut to the heart. Had it come to this! Even Mary shrank from what she thought his wickedness. He

went on hoarsely, “ You are not dying, Mary ; you cannot die while I hold you close to my heart ; my darling, my own love, no power shall take you from me. I will never speak harshly to you again ; you shall be bright and happy as you used to be at Rockstone.”

He had clasped her in his arms in a sort of despair, for the hue on her face was death-like ; she tried to speak again, but her words came more faintly.

“ Richard, if you love me you will do what I ask,” and then her eyes closed.

For a moment he thought she was dead, but he felt that her heart was still beating.

At the door he found the landlady and the pitying femme de chambre, and bidding them stay beside his wife till his return, he

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hastened to the street in which he had learned the English chaplain lived.

He knocked a long time, and at last a shrivelled old man opened the door.

“ Monsieur Harper is absent ; he will not be back for some days ; he has been very ill ; he is gone to Trouville.”

Meantime Mary had revived ; she asked for her husband, and had been told his errand. The news revived her. Could it be that Richard was changing—that God’s mercy was so great that she was to be granted, after all her long and wilful estrangement, yet another opportunity of leading a new and better life ? Her eyes were strained eagerly on the door when her husband came in.

He saw at once the change for the better

in her looks, and he shrank from what he had to tell.

“Is he coming?” she said, eagerly.

He was obliged to tell her the truth, and as she listened the light died out of her eyes, the faint tinge of colour fled from cheeks and lips, and that look of mysterious terror which had alarmed her husband returned.

“It was not to be; I have put it off too long; I have lived without religion, and I must die without any help—I do not know how to die.”

Her voice grew louder with her excitement. The landlady had left the bedside at Richard’s entrance; she came up to him now and touched his arm.

“Monsieur, you must get a doctor for

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madame ;" and she whispered, "Do you know how ill she is ?"

She did not understand the conversation between this unhappy pair ; she thought Mr. Wolferston had gone to fetch a doctor just now, and it seemed to her, instead of that, that he was wilfully killing his wife by the evident agitation he had caused by talking to her.

Richard was frantic. Why had he told Mary the truth ! He might have said the clergyman was following him—have framed any excuse to gain time.

He stood looking at his wife, powerless to speak or move.

The sharp-witted Frenchwoman saw her advantage ; she held him by the arm and led him out into the gallery, and told him

where to find the doctor. Then she slipped back again into Mary's room and locked the door, resolved to keep out as long as possible the imbécile of an Englishman, bent on frightening his wife to death.

Richard hurried down-stairs too overwrought to notice that a vehicle was clattering over the round stones of the courtyard. He was passing out into the street and he heard his name called, but he only hurried on the faster. It seemed to him as if Mary's life and death hung in the balance, and that on his speed rested the issue.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

IT was Janet's voice that Richard had heard, although he had not recognised it.

Mary's illness had been so sudden, and the women of the hotel had been so constantly in her room, that down-stairs it had scarcely been rumoured, and when Janet asked to be taken at once to her sister the garçon led the way along the bedroom gallery, and knocked at the door.

Janet had waited to let Mrs. Dawson

choose her rooms, and left her in them, so that nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed since Richard's departure, before she reached Mary's bedchamber.

The landlady's scared face when she opened the door frightened her. The woman tried to stop her, but Janet pushed past her and went up to the bedside.

"Madame is dead," said the femme de chambre, and she wrung her hands, sobbing.

Mary looked death-like ; the excitement had been succeeded by a sort of senseless stupor, and she lay there as pale and as ghastly as when Richard had first returned.

It was a dreadful shock for Janet, but she did not lose her presence of mind.

She sent away the sobbing femme de chambre, and then, with the landlady's help, she succeeded in restoring her sister to consciousness.

Mary showed no surprise at seeing Janet, but she signed to her to send the landlady away.

"You must not speak, dearest," Janet whispered, "or I shall have to go too."

There was silence for a while, but a tranquil look had come over the younger sister's face.

"Janet," she whispered, "I shall not get better till I have spoken."

There was such a wistful pleading in her eyes that tears sprang into Janet's; she bent down to listen.

"Janet, I have been very weak and

wicked ; but it is not only that, it is about Richard I want to speak. I cannot tell you all, but he is quite changed. Since my first baby died he has never smiled, he is so strange—so unhappy ; it seems to me that he has some dreadful secret ; or is it because he has left off loving me ? Tell me what I must do, Janet, or I shall die—I cannot go on living like this.”

“ Hush, dearest ! or you will make yourself still more ill.”

And then she did not know what more to say.

Mary’s words brought terrible confirmation of her own suspicions of Richard ; but she could not breathe them to his wife.

“ Have you prayed for Richard ?” she said, gently.

Mary shook her head.

"I dare not, I am too wicked," she said, sadly; "besides, Janet, do you think it would be any use?—the prayers of such as I am now could not be heard. Pray for me, Janet, and pray for Richard too; God will hear you, for you have not forsaken him."

Tears ran down her pale face. Janet was alarmed at this agitation, but her sister's imploring eyes constrained her to obey.

She knelt down beside the bed and prayed aloud fervently for both her sister and her husband.

Richard had not been able to find the doctor at his house; he was sent from one place to another, and finally was obliged to be content with a promise that Monsieur

Bouchard should visit his wife as soon as he came home.

“I will go back to Mary,” he thought; “if she is not better I must try and find some one else, although this seems the only man of any skill here.”

He opened his wife’s door very gently; Janet was kneeling by the bed, and he heard her words.

His heart swelled strangely, and tears sprang in his eyes, but he dashed them away and closed the door again.

Janet beside Mary at last! well, it mattered little now; though he could neither face Janet nor speak to her. It was a relief to feel that Mary was in safe hands—that the responsibility of watching over her no longer rested only on him.

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The look of his wife's pale sad face was more than he could bear. He paced up and down the gallery ; he took neither rest nor food ; but he could not bring himself to re-enter his wife's room.

Mary was growing weaker.

At last in the afternoon Dr. Bouchard came. He looked a quiet, sensible man, and Janet felt more hopeful when she saw him.

Not hopeful for long ; the doctor looked at Mary, felt her pulse, asked a few questions, and beckoned Janet to follow him to the door.

" Is that the lady's husband I met on the stairs ? " he asked.

" Yes."

" Well, then, it is necessary he should

be told ; you must tell him, mademoiselle, that there is no hope of saving his wife, she is dying ; I can do nothing for her."

The doctor hurried away after he had promised, at Janet's earnest request, to come again in the evening, and then she was left to obey his orders.

Her own sorrow was as nothing before the agony she was bid to inflict. For a moment it seemed to Janet as if she could not carry this news to Mary's husband.

While she stood at the open door hesitatingly, Richard appeared again at the end of the gallery.

She went quickly up to him. She never knew how she forced herself to the task, but in another instant she was holding Richard's unwilling hand between both

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hers, and repeating to him as tenderly and gently as she could the doctor's words.

He broke away from her before she had ended, and when in an agony of terror she followed him, he was standing beside Mary's bed.

Whether he had agitated his wife by his vehemence, or whether her increasing weakness had tended to this result, could not be known, but Mary sighed deeply, and then sank into so profound an insensibility that no efforts could revive her.

Richard flung himself down on the sofa in a paroxysm of remorse.

“I have killed her—both her and her children, for it is their loss that has broken her heart.”

Janet tried to soothe and quiet him, but he turned his face away.

Presently he burst forth again.

“ She is taken away from me to punish me ; how could such a wretch make her happy ? ”

And then came dead silence—the silence of suppressed agony, almost as terrible as that other silence which Janet trembled to think was even now changing into death.

Some few times she tried to moisten Mary’s lips ; in vain, she was dead to any power of movement.

As the sunlight faded a chilled dreariness filled the silent room.

The hours passed on ; Richard lay motionless on the sofa. It had grown dark,

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and Janet stole across the room to kindle a light.

The movement roused Richard.

He came up to her and grasped her arm.

“ You, at least, are happy ; you have no self-reproach,” he said ; “ Janet, if she ever wakens again I will tell you all you want to know. What value do I set on anything if I lose her ?”

He left the room abruptly. His words had been so strange and sudden that Janet scarcely realised them. She had a dim consciousness of some great cause for thankfulness, but her heart was too full of deep anxiety for her young sister to comprehend fully what it was that Richard had said to her.

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The trance continued ; but for a faint pulsation she would have thought that Mary had indeed been taken to her Rest.

There was a light tap at the door, and the doctor entered. This time he was far longer in examining his patient.

It seemed to Janet as if her own heart stood still till he spoke. He turned round sharply towards her, and at the change in his face her heart gave a bound that told how strongly hope had lingered in it.

He looked grave but no longer disturbed.

“ There has been a great change since I was here,” he said ; “ if madame awakens it will be, I hope, to live ; but I do not mean to affirm positively that she will awaken ; that depends on the natural

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strength of constitution, but I think you may hope. I will tell monsieur as I go downstairs."

He said the last words very gently. The delicate-looking English girl — for fatigue and anxiety had robbed Janet of all her bloom — seemed to him far too young and inexperienced to be in charge of so serious an illness, and also of such an impracticable brother-in-law.

"Monsieur will have another patient soon," said the landlady, when the doctor came out into the gallery again. "The husband of madame has not eaten all day— he only walks always up and down."

"It is not what I should have expected of an Englishman," the doctor answered, as Madame Chuquet dutifully attended him

to the entrance of the court-yard. "Englishmen keep their feelings in their pockets, they never let wives or any one else know they have any feelings."

Janet heard the bedroom door open softly, but she did not look round.

A horrible dread came to her that if Mary's life should be taken Richard might fall back again into even a more hopeless state.

"But this must be a temptation," she thought. "I am forgetting my darling mother's lessons; surely all trials come direct from our Heavenly Father, and will and must bring us nearer to Him if we give ourselves entirely to His guidance," but that "if" was full of doubt and trouble.

The night wore on, sometimes kneeling

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beside her lifeless sister, the tears streaming hotly on her clasped hands ; sometimes bending forward, straining her ears to catch the slightest change in the almost imperceptible breathing ; so the early twilight found Janet when it crept in and began to make things visible in the large, tawdrily-furnished room, creeping in its stealthy, steady fashion till it reached even the corners which had been so full of inky blackness. Janet's face looked pale and worn in the grey cold light ; she got up and wrapped a warmer shawl round her, for her limbs ached with cold. Then almost unconsciously her head sank on the pillow beside which she sat, and she slept.

Meanwhile Richard kept his watch. Up

and down, up and down the gallery, long after every footfall had died away in the deserted streets—after even the arrivals by the night train had subsided into repose—he kept pacing up and down.

He could not have slept, even if he had sought another sleeping-room. The thought of life without Mary was the torture gnawing at his heart ; a torture that made him desperate. Why had this happened ? Why was all joy to be taken from his life ? And then he said to himself how little of real happiness there had been in the last few weeks ; and the misery had been his making—all his. He went on pacing up and down.

Suddenly came back to him, as from far-off years, the sweet gentle face of Mary's

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mother, on that day at Rookstone when she had asked him not to try to win her daughter's love ; it came back with awful impressiveness, and with it thoughts of his own past life came, dream-like, in scattered fragments, which mingled as he tried to piece them together, in hazy undefined confusion, as the lines of a building in a dissolving view merge into the rigging and spars of a shipwrecked vessel. His own mother came in these memories ; he remembered beatings from her in childhood, and then—slight as the memory was, it yet remained—a shrinking from her incoherent speech and bloated face. Then came school-life ; a school where all was stern strictness and prying surveillance, where no act of himself or his comrades was free and

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uncontrolled, where a boy's word was not held sacred.

He remembered how he had rebelled against this constant suspicion and watchfulness, and then how he had found deceit and subservience more useful than resistance. It was in this school he knew that he had learned to detest religion and what seemed to him its dry, dull, harsh ways ; and then again memory grew clouded, and he had a confused vision of a long whitewashed room, with clusters of young heads bent over desks and slates, and texts in large bold type at intervals on the walls. One of these texts stood out clearly, and it seemed to Richard Wolferston to be branding itself on his very heart. He winced under the

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pain it gave. “ If any man cause one of these little ones to offend, it were better for him that a mill-stone were cast about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.”

He quickened his walk up and down; the words burned deeper and deeper into his soul. He saw them, and yet they were close upon him, whispering into his ears.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### PERPLEXITY.

AND all this while Henry Wenlock had not received one line from Janet, nothing to explain her strange absence and silence.

On his third visit to Vincent Square he questioned Mrs. Webb. It was a severe mortification to expose to any one so pre-disposed to judge harshly, that Janet had acted wrongly, but he felt that Mrs. Webb might possess some clue, or she might sug-

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gest something. He had called several times at Mrs. Dawson's, and had invariably received the answer, "Mistress is away from home—is expected home in a few days." When he asked where she was travelling he got no satisfaction. Spite of this he sent two letters to Janet, under cover to Mrs. Dawson, "to be forwarded," and still the silence went on.

He found Mrs. Webb alone in the drawing-room.

"Have you heard from Janet? Is she coming home?"

"I know nothing of Janet's movements." Mrs. Webb looked grave, and felt uncomfortable. She could not give up those letters to Henry now, they were ten days old.

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"But I suppose she told you what her plans were before she started?" He spoke impatiently.

Mrs. Webb looked aggrieved. "Once for all, I really am not answerable for Janet. I suppose she has a right to do as she likes without consulting you or me either; you know she is safe in Mr. Paison's hands. The day you left London, or the next, I'm sure I forgot which, Janet went to Mr. Paison, and the next morning, to my surprise, while I was dressing, I saw her arrive here in a cab soon after eight o'clock, and then I think it was the morning after that that she went off to France with Mrs. Dawson, and she has not written to me since."

"To France!" exclaimed Wenlock; "do

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you mean that Janet has gone abroad without consulting me, and that you have known it, and have not told me?"

It was necessary to him to vent his anger on some one, and Mrs. Webb knew this, although she affected surprise. "Really," she said, stiffly, "I must refuse to enter into any discussion on the subject. How could I suppose you were ignorant of Janet's movements? You have never asked a question about Janet since she went away, and you must remember that hitherto you have always resented any observations I have thought it my duty to make on Janet's conduct; it seems strange that you should expect me to force the subject on you; and yet now, because I do not at once blame her, you are also dis-

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pleased. I begin to think lovers are best left to settle their own disputes."

She indulged in her little tittering laugh. He made no answer, he did not know what to say.

"But,"—Mrs. Webb had softened her voice till it was almost tender—"there may be a letter at your lodgings? Janet might have been travelling for the first week or so; but within these last few days you surely would have heard from her. Shall I give you the address of the hotel at Paris? That is the only information she gave me about her movements. I forwarded the letter you sent to that hotel."

Captain Wenlock was still utterly bewildered.

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“But surely Janet told you how long she should be away?” he said. “She must have known I could not spare her just now.”

“You mean so near your marriage?” Mrs. Webb looked pityingly at the tall handsome man, bent, as she thought, on sacrificing himself. “I gave you once before my opinion on the subject of Janet’s feelings towards you, and I would rather not recur to that subject. I think now as I thought then. So far as I can remember, Janet simply gave me the address of the Paris hotel, and said she should not stay there very long, but she vouchsafed no further information—really, I have told you all I know.”

This was in answer to the earnest, searching look he bent on her, and she

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could meet it fearlessly, for so far she was speaking the truth. Janet had spoken those words ; Paris was the place where she hoped to find Mary ; she had not counted on going farther when she left Vincent Square.

Wenlock stood thinking a few minutes longer.

“Thank you,” he said, and he shook her hand heartily. “You must excuse me, I am a sad impatient fellow, I know, but there is something about this business which I cannot understand. I won’t stay, thank you ; I’m best alone to-day.”

“Come to-morrow, then,” she said, smiling ; “come every day, and then if a letter comes here from Janet you are sure to get it at once.”

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And Henry Wenlock went away.

Could this woman have been right all through ? She had not spoken spitefully just now, she had been disposed to take Janet's part against him. Well, he knew where to write to Janet now, for if she had only given the one address it was plain she meant to make Paris her headquarters.

He would write to her at once ; he had been fooled long enough ; he would ask her in plain words whether she wished to become his wife because she loved him, or whether she was only fulfilling her old promise from a sense of duty. And if she said "Yes" to this last question, what would happen ?—he paused, he could not answer himself at once.

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All brightness seemed to fade out of his future: all the hopes and plans of so many many months clouded suddenly; but he was too angry, too outraged to listen to any regrets. Janet was no longer the Janet he had loved so dearly. What security had he in the love of a woman who obstinately refused him her confidence, who had, as he remembered bitterly now, the very last time they were together, refused to yield her will to his? He would wait the issue of this letter, and if it were that which he feared it would be, he would try to forget the happiness he had promised himself.

The suspense that followed the acting-out of this resolution was not easy to bear. It was a relief to pass his evenings in

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Vincent Square, and Louisa devoted herself more and more to please him. So far as her frivolous, shallow nature could love, she loved Henry, and the hidden affection gave a soft charm to her manner which won him greatly. He was more and more unhappy, and sore-hearted, as day after day went on and no answer came to his letter : he had set all feelings of pride aside in writing it ; he had poured out afresh the story of his love to Janet, and asked her if she could not and would not return it. Her silence seemed to him worse than a decided refusal would have been. Ah ! she had refused him once, as he well remembered now : why had he not taken warning then ?

And evening after evening Mrs. Webb

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watched the pair at the piano growing more and more interested in each other, and she said to herself that if matters went on as favourably for only a few days longer, Janet Wolferston might come home in safety.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### AT LAST.

EXHAUSTED, worn-out in mind and body, Richard had lain down at last outside Mary's door, and had sunk at once into a deep, heavy sleep. More than once during his lonely pacing up and down the gallery he had gently looked into the bed-chamber, but he had seen nothing to indicate that any change had come.

In giving him this new hope, the doctor had cautioned him so severely on the dan-



ger of any sudden awakening, that Richard had not dared to go up to the bedside even to look at his wife.

It was market day in Caen, and there were plenty of sounds in the busy street before the household of the Hotel St. Barbe was stirring: donkey-carts jogging over the stones with their many-coloured vegetable cargo, rosy onions and brilliant orange carrots, and cabbage of many kinds, fringed with tufts of herbs; shrill-voiced women in their snowy skull-caps, with cockscomb frill of lace a-top—a poor substitute for the time-honoured Normandy caps of their grandmothers—were shouting “*Pommes, mes belles pommes*” as they pushed long trays of shrivelled apples along the street.

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Mary's room was at the back of the house, so the sounds scarcely reached it; but though Richard lay in the open gallery, he slept on through all, till the step of the garçon de chambre passed him on his way down-stairs. He sprang up in sudden surprise at finding himself where he was, and stared so wildly, that the garçon went down and confided to the stableman—pumping just now in the court-yard—that the English monsieur was mad.

Memory soon brought back the past night to Richard Wolferston. He was stiff and sore from lying out there on the hard boards; but yet he felt less wretched than when he had laid himself down on them. He bent his head to listen. All was silent in the bed-room. He opened the door

gently and went in. Janet's head lay on the pillow beside her sister's : his entrance had not wakened her. The room was full of light, and he went softly up to the bed and looked at Mary. Her face was still pale, but the painful fixed expression had left it. How young and childlike she looked, her dimpled lips just parted by her breathing !

Thoughts, new and earnest thoughts, filled his heart as he looked on this fair young girl, so pure and sinless, as he told himself, when she had absolutely given herself to him—for good or evil—which ? Again he stood thinking. His face grew strangely convulsed ; good and evil were battling fiercely. As he stood gazing on the lovely sleeping face, the eyes opened gently, and Mary smiled at him, and

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stretched out her hand towards him. The man's whole nature heaved in a mighty struggle, and then he fell down on his knees by the bed-side, and burst into a passion of tears.

The sound roused Janet. It seemed to her that she was dreaming ; she heard Richard's voice — broken, choked —but still she could make out what he said,—“Thank God ! thank God !”

The doctor had pronounced himself perfectly satisfied with the state of the patient ; he stayed beside her until Madame Chuquet was installed in Janet's place.

“ If you do not repose yourself, mademoiselle, you too will be ill,” the doctor said.

Janet left the bed-room, but she was not allowed to obey the doctor immediately ; she found Richard waiting for her outside in the gallery.

" You know what I promised you," he said ; " I am ready to keep my word, but it seems to me quite possible that this new mood I am in may not last. You had better come with me into this room at once, I may change my mind in an hour's time."

There was a bitter unbelief in himself in his words ; but it seemed to Janet natural that so proud and reserved a man should wish to hide his real feelings. He led the way into a small sitting-room at the other end of the gallery, and drew forward an easy-chair for Janet. He did not seat himself, he stood leaning against the white-

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panelled wall, his back to the light, his eyes shaded with one hand.

“I suppose you have heard,” he said, “why my father was disinherited? and why, instead of being brought up at Rookstone, I struggled through all the first part of my life an orphan and an outcast? Of course you have been told the story. Painson would take care to inform you of it. My grandfather had much to answer for. My father died when I was a boy, and my other parent had never been acknowledged by my relatives, and therefore could not be expected to have any liking for them. I grew up with the belief that Rookstone was mine by right, and that your father kept possession of it, knowing it not to be his. He wrote to me asking me to come to

England, and claiming me as his cousin, and I accepted his invitation. I was determined to expose his injustice. I had often thought of coming before, but I had to support my mother, and there were reasons why I did not want to bring her to England with me, and I was not rich enough to provide for her in California ; but she had died when Christopher wrote to me. Before I ever saw your father I went to the family solicitor's office ; these people had always paid me the income allowed by my grandfather, so I knew all about them. I saw Mr. Paison, and I tell you frankly, Janet, that I have never been able to forgive the way in which he explained to me the reasons for my grandfather's conduct. No doubt I irritated him

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by my suspicions of Christopher, and he did not spare my father's memory. I came out of the office with the full knowledge of my father's errors, and a determined resolution to be revenged on Paison for having made me acquainted with them. I had disliked your father because I considered he had kept me out of my lawful rights, now I hated him because I saw no chance of wresting Rookstone from him.

"When I saw your father, my hatred died out, it was impossible not to be friends with him, but still I did not forgive him for occupying my place.

"I soon made up my mind that Mary should be my wife, and if Christy had not come in my way, I should never, I think, have done that which I did do. I had dis-

covered your mother's dislike to my attachment. It exasperated me, for I had sounded your father, and I knew he would not oppose it. I had by this time ousted Pains-  
son, and had got the management of the property into my own hands. Till then I had hardly known how I coveted Rookstone, but the longing grew daily. Your father was too easy, too generous, to improve the property as I wished. I believe I have a special gift that way, and it seemed to me terrible that so much opportunity should be wasted.

“Janet, do you remember one evening when I came down by appointment? It was to take your father's instructions about his will.”

He broke off and looked at his listener. She had turned very pale; but she said

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“ Yes ” in a firm voice. Her whole soul was wrought up to listen.

“ On that evening your mother’s manner galled me beyond endurance ; when I went into the study with Christopher, he asked me if he might tell her the story of my father’s disinheritance, and I refused. It had always been kept secret, and I felt indignant with him for wanting to expose this family disgrace to a stranger. My manner annoyed him, and when I left Rookstone next morning, it seemed to me that his wife had infected him with her coldness. At dinner, too, on the previous evening, I saw that she prevented me from sitting beside Mary, and he made no effort to help me as he had often done before. In the week that followed, the devil got the better of me. I dare say,

Janet, you think, as your mother thought, that because I despise outward religious forms and ordinances, I am a thorough unbeliever—there you are wrong. I don't quite know what I believe ; but I have not chosen to submit to what seemed to me mere human teaching. I dare say I'm not much better now, but last night I learned one lesson at any rate. Well, at the end of a week I came to Rookstone again. The last time I walked through the park I had almost cursed little Christy for standing between me and its possession—on this day the very sight of the place tortured me. I came into the saloon filled with evil, rancorous thoughts ; your mother was sitting there alone, and, as if the tempter had set her on to do it, she spoke to me about my

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love for Mary. I believe I began by reproaching her with coldness ; but she went on to tell me she disapproved of my attachment, and wished it ended. Ended ! Just as if it was a thing I could take off and put by like a glove—love that had grown into an absorbing passion. I had paved the way for the fraud I contemplated, but I had left myself the possibility of leaving it undone. It seemed to me that your mother's sentence shut the door on this possibility ; I took it as a warrant for what I did afterwards.

“ Now listen, Janet, for here is the end. The will your father instructed me to prepare was the draft that you, and I believe your mother also, found in Christopher's study. I read it over to him, and then,

when he rose up to ring the bell for the servants who came to sign it, I changed it for the one by virtue of which I possess Rookstone ; which, during that week, the devil had put into my head to draw up also.

“ Now you see, perhaps, why I told you the truth, and could persist in it, when I said the signatures were genuine.”

Janet sat still listening ; but Richard waited for her to speak.

“ Yes, I understand,” she said at last ; “ but why did you keep the real draft of the will ?”

“ Why, indeed ! I suppose what you would call my good angel had not quite left me even then. I had a sort of notion that I might die before Christy, and die child-

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less after all ; and in that case I meant him to know that his father had not intentionally disinherited him. The will left there told no tales, for it was unsigned ; but I kept the study fastened, for in the same drawer, if you had looked for it, you would have found a letter in my handwriting, with the necessary explanations. Just before I left Rookstone the will disappeared ; the letter I have with me."

He looked at her, she fancied, as if to question her, and she answered at once,—

"The will was brought to me two days ago."

"Ah !" he said ; but he made no further comment.

There was a silence, and then Richard sat down and covered his face with his hands.

The next moment Janet's arms were round his neck, and he felt her kisses on his forehead.

"You are my own brother now," she whispered; "God will comfort and help you."

"Don't think I have told you this for your sake, or for Christy's." His voice was hoarse and broken. "It seemed to me that unless I confessed all, Mary would be taken away, and I don't care for life without her."

## CHAPTER XIX.

## PEACE.

HENRY WENLOCK had given Janet up, or rather he had come sadly to the conclusion that she had given him up. She had not answered the letter he had sent her at the Hotel des Princes.

“ There is no use in any farther humiliation,” he said, bitterly.

He tried to put the thought of Janet from him ; the bitter sorrow and mortification were too much, and yet he could not

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fully realise that this hope in which he had so long lived was taken from him, and that he must plan his life afresh.

Mrs. Webb pressed him to come to Vincent Square, and he went there evening after evening, and she soon found out that he had not heard from Janet. It soothed Henry to listen to Louisa's songs, and to Louisa's kind, gentle words. It kept him from the bitter thought of Janet's falsehood.

One morning he received a note from Mrs. Webb.

“Will you come earlier than usual to-day?” she wrote; “come in the afternoon. I want specially to see you.”

He went to Vincent Square. Mrs. Webb had not come in from her walk, but she would be in directly.

Louisa was in the drawing-room reading.

"I did not know you ever read ;" Wenlock had grown into a brotherly way of teasing Louisa. "I thought you only practised and did fancy work."

Instead of the laugh he expected, Louisa bent her head over her book and looked miserable.

"What's the matter ?" he went and sat down by her. "Come, Louisa, you are not affronted. I was only joking. I think you a——"

But here Louisa hid her face with the book and actually sobbed.

Henry Wenlock was very soft-hearted ; he bent over the sobbing girl.

"Come, come, what is it ? What have I done to vex you, Louey ?"

But Louey's sobs increased. He bent still closer over her, perplexed and grieved to have caused all this agitation.

The door opened, and Mrs. Webb came in.

She stood still, with a very puzzled look on her face.

“Louisa.”

Mrs. Webb took no notice of Henry Wenlock's greeting.

“Louisa, you had better go upstairs. I want to speak to Captain Wenlock.”

Louisa's face was very red indeed, but she obeyed and went away.

Mrs. Webb seated herself, and then she looked at Henry Wenlock with a most provoking smile.

He was confused, annoyed, and alto-

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gether upset by the false position in which Mrs. Webb's sudden entrance had placed him.

"Well," she said, in her teasing voice, "what can you have been saying to make Louey cry, I wonder. I thought, you know, you were such excellent friends."

"So we are," and then he stopped.

Mrs. Webb looked grave.

"I have taken no notice," she said, "but of course I have seen what has been going on, and I think it is time to ask you to explain yourself."

"Explain myself. I don't understand you."

"Really, Captain Wenlock," Mrs. Webb sat stiffly upright, "I should have thought my question a very natural one. When a man persists in paying regular, almost

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daily, attentions to a young lady, marked attentions too, there is usually only one meaning to be attached to his behaviour. I conclude your engagement with Janet Wolferston is over, and, if so, I can see but one motive for your visits here; in any case it is plain that you have been trying to win my dear child's affections, and it is of course quite time that I should ask whether you have done so in definite words."

"I!"—Henry stood conscience-struck; he asked himself what he had been doing.  
"I have said nothing of the kind to Louisa."

"Poor dear, loving child!"

Mrs. Webb put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You must excuse me, Captain Wen-

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lock, if I have seemed premature, but you see I am a mother, and a tender mother too. I know how deeply Louisa treasures up looks and words, and"—her manner changed to a sudden sternness—"I can only say if you have been trifling with this depth of feeling, you are not the person I supposed you to be. I thought you the soul of honour, Captain Wenlock, or I should not have welcomed you here."

The room went round with Henry ; he was truly vexed, discomfited, bewildered even by Mrs. Webb's representation of his conduct, but he felt on dangerous ground ; he resolved not to answer her now.

"I confess you have surprised me very much," he said, "and I must think over all you have been saying by myself. I believe

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you are mistaken, but I shall know better when I have thought the matter over."

Mrs. Webb hesitated. If she let him go without any decided proposal for Louisa he might never come back ; she looked at him, there was a straightforward determination in the young man's face that brought back an uncomfortable memory of those letters lying in a locked-up drawer.

"Very well," she said, gravely, "you understand I have only spoken to fulfil my duty as a mother. You will let me hear from you as soon as possible, for," she twinkled her eye-lashes to keep in some imaginary tears, "my darling Louey's happiness is my most pressing care."

Henry Wenlock went back to his rooms. He sat down before his writing-table, put

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both elbows on it, plunged his fingers into his hair as if to keep it from straying into his brains, and set himself to think out this dilemma.

Dared he hope that Janet could ever be his wife ?

He still sometimes caught at a gleam of hope ; his letter might have gone astray, but it was only a gleam, and it clouded over at once, even if she had not heard from him, she could have written.

Yes—the terrible doubt which had first tormented him, on the night that Janet refused to become his wife, was now a sad certainty. Janet had found herself unable to love him. Her first feelings for him, before he went to India, had been a mere girlish liking ; re-union had shown her

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that he was not that which she had, during their separation, imagined him to be. Janet did not love him, and she had resolved not to marry him.

“ But even then,” the poor fellow clasped his hands together, and bowed his head on them, “ even if she despises me — even if I am altogether unworthy of her love; this treatment of me is so utterly unlike her. Janet must be strangely changed to consider it necessary to run away from me, and from every one, to avoid marrying me. Janet, as I still believe in her, would not have done this ; she would have faced me ; she would have told me her changed feelings ; she would have blamed herself instead of punishing me. She would not have gone away without a word, I am

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sure she would not ; there must be something to account for her silence ; even if she could not love me, she would have thought of my suffering ; she would have blamed herself wholly."

He started up impatiently. Why had he not seen all this sooner ? He knew it was because he had turned angrily from all thought—he had resolutely refused to face this sorrow at all—he had taken every means he could to drive reflection away.

" I cannot believe it, and I will not. If Janet has so acted, she must have been untrue from the beginning ; I could not have been so completely deceived except by a very artful woman."

He walked up and down the room less impatiently. Mrs. Webb's home question

had done him good. The mist of wrath and disappointment which had lately possessed him had cleared away.

“If Janet is not true, then the whole world and everything in it, is one great falsehood.”

He had sat down at his writing-table to think over his note to Mrs. Webb ; but he could not please himself with what he wrote.

“My brain is scarcely clear now—to-morrow I shall be able to see things as they really are.”

He took up his hat ; he could not stay indoors brooding over his perplexities. He met his landlady on the stairs.

“A note for you, sir. The lady would not give it to the servant. She asked me to bring it you myself.” .

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Henry's first thought was of Mrs. Webb ; he opened the note indignantly, then his eyes fastened on the writing with almost delirious joy.

He looked at the landlady.

"The lady is waiting at the door, sir, in a carriage. There are two ladies."

He pushed the woman aside, and then sprang down stairs.

Mrs. Dawson bent forward from the carriage and began an elaborate invitation ; but Henry Wenlock did not look at her.

He helped, almost lifted Janet out.

"You'll excuse me now, won't you, Mrs. Dawson ? I'll only keep Janet half-an-hour, and then I'll bring her to Harley Street."

He told the coachman to drive home, and then he took Janet upstairs.

He asked no questions—he had her there safe in his arms again. Just then he cared for nothing else.

Janet tried to begin her story, but he only stopped her mouth.

“Now I have you safe, darling, it does not matter how I lost you.” And then they both kept still, in that hush of perfect happiness which some folks never know. It was quite half-an-hour before they remembered time or Mrs. Dawson.

Janet’s first words of explanation showed Mrs. Webb’s treachery; and Henry saw the trap that had been set for him.

“You must not go back to Vincent Square,” he said; “I shall expose that woman’s conduct.”

“I won’t go back there, darling. But

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you must not say anything to Mrs. Webb. We are so happy, why should we torment anyone—we need not see her, you know, we could not—poor woman, she will be sorry some day. Her own conscience will be her best punishment,” said Janet.

“ She deserves punishment, those sort of women ought to be punished.” He was not satisfied ; it seemed to him that Mrs. Webb deserved to be exposed. However just then he could not refuse Janet anything. “ Remember this, darling, next Tuesday I claim you just as if this journey had not come between ; if the gowns are not ready that is no fault of mine—gowns are not necessary for happiness, are they, darling ? I’ll have no more delays. I shall not believe you are mine till we are actually off to Scotland.”

And so on the Tuesday they were married.

They had decided on going to Scotland for their marriage journey, and they went there.

Two days after their return Janet was told that a person wanted her.

"I was to say Thompson, ma'am, as the name you'd know her best by."

Janet was puzzled. Her visitor came in curtseying and blushing.

"I said Thompson, ma'am, at least, that is to say that you might guess—" she seemed in a fluttered state of nervousness ; "but I've changed it. I am Madame Leroux." The sound of the name was plainly encouraging. She drew herself up and looked quiet.

"You don't mean you have married that

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Frenchman," said Janet hastily, and then she stopped.

"Well, ma'am," the dressmaker bridled, "I always was partial to foreigners, and you see, ma'am, I didn't know what to do—Alphonse — Monsieur Leroux, I mean, wouldn't take no for an answer, for, of course, Miss Wolferston—I beg pardon, to be sure, I should say Mrs. Wenlock, ma'am, —we've both changed our names—I didn't say yes at once, dear me, no ma'am, and then my partner, Miss Briggs, she said that 'Madame' would look so well on the cards and the door-plate, and help the business; so you see, ma'am, it cut two ways,"—she smiled, she felt satisfied with the way she had made out her case,— "and there was no help for it."

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Mrs. Wenlock smiled too. "I hope you will be very happy." She shook hands with her old servant. "I think you will have a kind husband. I shall not forget that Monsieur Leroux was very kind to me when I was in France, and very clever in helping me to find Mrs. Wolferston. I don't think we should have found her without your husband's advice."

"So he says, ma'am. The truth is he came with me—he would like to pay his respects to you, ma'am, if you would allow it."

Leroux came in; he looked quieter and more respectable, Janet thought, but still she could hardly help smiling at the contrast between the sharp-eyed, keen-witted Frenchman, and placid, middle-aged, dowdy

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Thompson, though to-day Madame Leroux's dowdiness had made an effort at smartening, she looked something like a Dorking hen with a macaw's feather here and there.

"Madame"—Monsieur Leroux laid his hand upon his heart and bowed—"it 'ave come into my mind that you may in some moments feel a disquietude that your affairs and the affairs of the family of Wolferstone should be by me spoken about and disclosed. Madame, that is one reason I 'ave in marrying my so charming wife—we are only married a week ago—I say to myself, Alphonse Leroux, there is an old and very respectable family which have a secret, and they do not wish the manner and history of this secret to be spoken about. Well, madame, I look round and

I see there is myself," he checked the names off on his fat fore-finger, "and there is Madame Thompson, and that is the whole of the persons who are acquainted with it. There is perhaps, also, Madame Kittie, but then she is very old woman, and also she do not, I think, speak so good English as easily can be understood. It seem then to me well for your sake, madame"—he bowed again to Janet—"to give way to the natural inclination of my 'eart"—a devoted glance at his wife—"and ask Madame Thompson to make me 'appy; and therefore I come to tell you the result, madame, of my solicitude for the family of Wolferston."

Here he waited for Mrs. Wenlock to speak.

*ROOKSTONE.*

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“The secret is over,” said Janet, coldly.  
“Mr. Wolferston does not intend to return  
to England. I hope you will make my old  
friend happy, Monsieur Leroux; she de-  
serves a very good husband.”

“Ah, madame, my life will be devoted  
to her ‘appiness.”

“Poor Thompson”—Janet was telling  
her husband of this visit—“I am afraid if  
she had not a comfortable home, and some  
dependence on Christy, that Frenchman  
would not have thought of marrying her.”

Janet never kept another secret from her  
husband, and by the way in which she  
defers to his slightest wish, no one would  
guess she had ever been called “strong-  
minded and self-willed.”

Christy is master of Rookstone now—Richard Wolferston at once relinquished all right to it. He and Mary live in Germany, where he holds an appointment.

They are not rich, and they are as yet childless. Richard is still wayward,—troubled with stormy doubts, but he is changed in all ways for the better. They are both more truly happy than when they were in possession of Rookstone.

THE END.









